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THE TRAIL OF THE TORCH

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY
PAUL HERVIEU
of the Académie Française

TRANSLATED BY
JOHN ALAN HAUGHTON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
BRANDER MATTHEWS

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1915

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To
MADAME REJANE

With homage and grateful thanks for her incarnation of mother love, so lifelike, so fierce, and so tender.

—P. H.

INTRODUCTION

THE French have been fortunate above all other peoples in the continuity of their dramatic literature. In other languages there have been epochs of superb dramatic productivity: in England under Elizabeth and in Spain about the same time; but both in England and in Spain this era of affluence was followed by long periods of penury. In France, however, from the "Cid" to "Cyrano de Bergerac," for nearly three centuries, the drama has never sunk below an honorably high level; and every generation has brought forth its own group of interesting playwrights, men of the theatre who were also men of letters. The Romanticists of 1830, headed by Victor Hugo and the elder Dumas, were succeeded twoscore years later by the more realistic analists of social conditions headed by Augier and the younger Dumas, who dominated the French drama in 1870. And now, when another twoscore years have passed, the Parisian playhouses are illumined by the very varied works of Rostand, Brieux, and Hervieu. While

comparisons are unbecoming, there is no difficulty in declaring which of these three is the most highly gifted as a dramatist. Rostand is a lyric poet, delighting in verbal decoration; Brieux is a social inquisitor, thinking more of his thesis than of his plot; Hervieu is a born playwright, absorbed in the problems of human conduct which are the essential material of the modern social drama.

Like Barrie in Great Britain, Sudermann in Germany, and d'Annunzio in Italy, Paul Hervieu made his first appearance as a novelist with a series of satiric studies of fashionable life in France. Then he abandoned the laxer prose fiction for the more rigid and more difficult drama, irresistibly tempting to one of his temperament, an artist in construction and a moralist delighting in handling the moments of crisis "when duty and inclination come nobly to the grapple." He soon mastered the technic of the theatre; and he has revealed his mastery in a dozen severe and austere social dramas, the plots of which were put together with implacable logic and almost with the unadorned directness of a demonstration in mathematics.

We are a little inclined to confuse the soul of tragedy with its external trappings—with blank verse

and five acts, historic costumes and localities remote in time and space. True tragedy demands none of these things; and it exists when struggling human beings are presented to us, immeshed in inexorable circumstance and when the action rolls onward irresistibly to the irrevocable and overwhelming end. The "Ghosts" of Ibsen is a true tragedy, although it is in three acts, not five, in prose not verse, and in a modern room and not an antique palace. True tragedies also are most of Paul Hervieu's plays, not so drastic as Ibsen's sombre study of heredity, but instinct with the same unflinching veracity.

The history of human society is the record of the unending conflict between the desires of the individual and the demands of the social organization. Man cannot live alone; he needs the aid and the support of others; and to gain this he must surrender more or less of his own freedom; and sometimes this necessary surrender imposes a heavy burden on the individual who has to suffer for the greater benefit of the multitude. The social organization is based on the family, and whatever weakens the family tie, relaxes the social band dangerously. Divorce, for example, is disintegrating, and yet if divorce is never to be obtained many men and many women would be

condemned to life-long misery. And the question is where can we find a just equilibrium between wide freedom of divorce and narrow insistence upon the indissolubility of marriage.

In this unending conflict between the individual and society as a whole, Hervieu, like Ibsen, is on the side of the individual, although he is not so thoroughgoing as the stern Scandinavian whose doctrines were frankly anarchistic. This attitude is of immense value to Hervieu as it was to Ibsen, for it compels him to deal with characters strong of will, straining every muscle in a struggle against the bonds which constrict them. And the more searching our study of the drama may have been the more clearly do we perceive that in all times and in all places, audiences in a theatre are likely to have their interest most easily aroused and most keenly intensified by the spectacle of a struggle and by a story in which characters of overmastering volition contend against one another, or against fate, or against law.

In "The Trail of the Torch" the art of Hervieu is seen at its best. The theme is of universal and of perennial appeal. The exposition is clear and the action is simple. The characters are all necessary; and they express themselves always to the point. The con-

struction is adroit and vigorous. The story grips us at the beginning; and it holds us breathless to the truly tragic end. And the austerity, the severity, the logical integrity of the author's method intensifies the potency of the emotional appeal. We may not approve of the choice made by the unhappy heroine torn between the irreconcilable duties of a daughter and a mother, but we cannot help feeling with her and feeling for her.

BRANDER MATTHEWS.

Played for the first time at the Théâtre du Vaudeville, April 17, 1901, with the following cast:

Maravon	Mons. Lerand
Stangy	Gaston Dubose
The Doctor	Nertann
Didier Maravon	Paul Numa
Gribert	Leubas
Jirbin	Mauloy
Constant	Prika
Sabine Revel	Mme. Rejane
Mme. Fontenais	Daynes-Grassot
Mme. Ponthionne	Juliette Darcourt
Marie-Jeanne	Bernou
Leonie	Dorville
Mme. Gribert	Morlet
Jenny	Viarny
Beatrice	Lucienne

The first and third acts take place at the home of Mme. Fontenais in Paris. The second at the home of Didier Maravon, Boulogne-sur-Seine. The fourth act at Maloja in the Engadine.

THE TRAIL OF THE TORCH

ACT I

SCENE: *A drawing-room. Flowers here and there give an air of an informal gathering. At the right is a door leading into a hallway, at the left another door into a smoking-room. Through a double door at the back a number of people are seen around a supper table. When the curtain rises,* MME. FONTENAIS *is discovered seated in an armchair reading a newspaper with a lorgnette. Enter* DIDIER *by the door on the left.*

MME. FONTENAIS. Ah! It's you, Didier. I suppose you have left the other men in the smoking-room?

DIDIER. And you, Mme. Fontenais, I suppose you are poring over the stock market?

MME. FONTENAIS. Not at all! I don't understand business and I don't want to. My property has always remained exactly as my poor dear husband left it to me. Indeed, I've never altered a thing of his. I am even reading his newspaper [*shows the*

wrapper]. It's still his, you see, because I always renew the subscription in his name. I suppose I am foolish, but I like to pretend every evening when I unfold that paper that he will read to me for an hour, just as he did while we were together. That is why I always sit alone here about this time and try to recall the sound of his voice as I read to myself [*folds the newspaper*]. But let us talk about yourself, not about me. How is it that after acquitting yourself so brilliantly and getting all those diplomas and things, you are not going in for teaching? It's so sure, I should have thought you would have preferred it to anything else. And then the example of your father. To-day dear Monsieur Maravon is retired with honor, still vigorous and healthy, after his thirty years of activity in public instruction. He can live, henceforth, independent and surrounded by his friends and his books, and look at life with the eye of a philosopher. A career of that kind did not seem worth while to you?

DIDIER. My father accomplished his task in his own way, Madame, as I must accomplish mine, in my own way. He, a son of the peasantry, raised himself several steps in the social scale by his own effort and by the work of his brain. I feel within me

the same impulse—the impulse of my race but one generation removed from the tillers of the soil. And I want in my turn to get beyond that point, to climb still higher.

MME. FONTENAIS. Still higher? Do you mean that you hope even to gain a title?

DIDIER. Well—perhaps even that. I want to be rich, very rich. If one is a millionaire in these days it is comparatively easy to become a baron or a count.

MME. FONTENAIS. And you think you have already the chance of making a great fortune?

DIDIER. Why not? I own a patent of the first order. My father has put into it everything we have including my mother's money. This sum, though modest, is a basis which has enabled me to form a company, and my factory is about to be opened.

MME. FONTENAIS. Supposing you do not succeed?

DIDIER. Not succeed! Why, the thing is absolutely certain. Every emergency has been provided for, every expense and all profits have been carefully balanced. Figures don't lie, you know, and I have behind me a ring of bankers, men who look at things broadly, and they all of them say go

ahead. If I need more capital at any time to enlarge my works, I have only to speak the word and I shall have what money I want; that is understood. And, above all, I am firm in the conviction that success comes to those who deserve it for their industry, their aptitude, and their probity—— What are you smiling at?

MME. FONTENAIS. I am smiling with you, my dear Didier, not at you. I love to see your youthful ardor and your firm faith, and I smile as one does at a cheerful fire on one's hearth when one comes in out of the cold, for it has been winter in my soul a long time now. You were only a little boy when my troubles began with the ruin of my son-in-law, but you probably remember my daughter, pale with weeping, coming back again to my home in her widow's weeds and carrying her delicate orphan baby in her arms!

DIDIER. Yes, Madame, I remember only too well all the sorrows and the losses that you and yours have suffered. But when I look at your household now, it is like a holy place. You, the grandmother; Mme. Revel, your daughter; and Marie-Jeanne, your granddaughter, all three living together in tender harmony, you seem to me to realize the ideal family

relation, to represent a beautiful triptych of the three ages.

MME. FONTENAIS. I should certainly be ungrateful if I did not thank Heaven for giving me the means of making my dear children happy and keeping them near me.

DIDIER. And may I say that it is also because you have the art of endearing yourself to every one who knows you?

MME. FONTENAIS. Flatterer!

DIDIER. It is wonderful to hear Marie-Jeanne—[*correcting himself*]—Mademoiselle Marie-Jeanne talk about you.

[*Enter* MARIE-JEANNE *from the room at the back. She carries a cup in each hand.*]

MARIE-JEANNE. Will you have tea, Grandmother, or chocolate?

MME. FONTENAIS [*getting up*]. I'll go in there, my child. You wait on Didier and I'll leave you alone together to talk about—me! [*Exit centre.*

MARIE-JEANNE. Which cup will you have?

DIDIER [*taking one*]. Either. It doesn't matter.

MARIE-JEANNE. Grandmother was making fun of us, I'm sure. Did you say anything to her?

DIDIER. Not a word either to her or to my father.

You see, I'm obeying you although I'm literally boiling over inside! When I asked you to marry me, you yourself fixed the date when you would speak to your mother, your eighteenth birthday, to-day! I am all the more impatient now because I no longer have the sense of future payment to help me restrain myself, and the barrier you set up as a sort of fetich ceases to exist to-day.

MARIE-JEANNE. My dear Didier, the reason I did not go to my mother directly we understood each other was because I did not want her to be able to say that I had acted in haste. After this delay I can tell her truly that I have consulted my heart and my feelings and have reflected thoroughly with my mind.

DIDIER. And yet you have left me not a single definite hope! Have you weighed carefully your promise to me?

MARIE-JEANNE. Yes, and it is almost with superstition that I chose to-day for the beginning of our union, sooner, much sooner than I ought. You see, ever since I can remember, my birthdays have always been made happy days for me with gifts, flowers, and a gathering of my dearest friends, and I have come to look upon this day as my lucky day.

That is why I chose it and that is why I no longer refuse my promise.

DIDIER. You make me wild with joy! I feel like falling on my knees and crying out my happiness to all the world!

MARIE-JEANNE. Hush! This evening though, when everybody has gone, I will talk to mother, and I know I can convince her.

DIDIER. I will go right away.

MARIE-JEANNE. Why hurry?

DIDIER. I couldn't talk rationally after this. I should want to kick out through the door any one who came in now. I have you now within me. I shall be more with you, more completely with you, all alone in the open air walking at random in the intoxication of hope—and apprehension.

MARIE-JEANNE. Do not be afraid. My mother likes you and I—I love you.

DIDIER. Marie-Jeanne, promise that you will marry me within two months.

MARIE-JEANNE. Yes!

DIDIER. Good-bye, then!

MARIE-JEANNE. Till to-morrow.

[DIDIER *kisses her hand. Exit, right.* LEONIE *enters from the room at the back. She*

wears a dress only slightly cut out at the neck, and an ankle-length skirt.]

LEONIE. I came to look for you so we could have a little talk before I go.

MARIE-JEANNE. But you're not going just yet, Leonie?

LEONIE. Well, you know what a hurry mother is always in to get to a ball! If it were only myself I'd never go out at all, and in a dress like this! I suppose it's because I go to so many cotillons that I'm already on the point of getting married. But it's very humiliating to have to tell every partner that I am nineteen, though you'd never guess it in such a frock!

MARIE-JEANNE. But if you don't like going out why don't you say you'd rather stay at home?

LEONIE. Father wouldn't let me. He won't have mamma go anywhere in the evening without me.

[*Enter* MME. PONTHIONNE *dressed far too youthfully, followed by* JIRBIN.]

MARIE-JEANNE [*softly to* LEONIE]. Hasn't Monsieur Jirbin asked your mother for your hand yet?

LEONIE. He doesn't dare! Mamma frightens him nearly to death! [MARIE-JEANNE *and* LEONIE *continue to converse in an undertone.*]

MME. PONTHIONNE [*coquettishly to* JIRBIN]. There

is something about your attitude toward me that is very mysterious: a charming sort of timidity, may I say? Women always feel drawn to those who respect them—excessively. You always seem on the point of making some kind of declaration, I don't know just what, and to be held back by a sort of delicacy. I won't ask you what it is because I might be displeased if I knew!

JIRBIN. Oh! Madame, I only want to inspire you with confidence in me. But although I always try to go to entertainments where I know you will be with your daughter, our conversation always seems to me to be too short——

MME. PONTHIONNE. Doesn't it occur to you that you might see us somewhere else than in other people's houses?

JIRBIN. Do you mean that you will permit me to call upon you? At first if only as a friend——

MME. PONTHIONNE. And afterward?

JIRBIN. Afterward—some day—if you will give your consent—as your son-in-law.

MME. PONTHIONNE [*displeased*]. What! You! My daughter! Excuse me, but I had no idea of anything of that kind. I don't know what to say—— I—I——

[BEATRICE, *very much overdressed, enters from the room at the back.*]

MARIE–JEANNE. Are you going on to the same ball, Beatrice?

BEATRICE. Oh! I'm going to two balls to-night and three to-morrow night!

[MME. GRIBERT, *dressed with extreme simplicity, enters centre.*]

MME. GRIBERT. Dear Marie-Jeanne, won't you tell them to get Beatrice's cloak ready so she won't catch cold in the dressing-room?

MARIE–JEANNE. Certainly, Madame.

MME. PONTHIONNE [*to* MARIE–JEANNE]. Since you're going, will you have them look after ours, too?

MARIE–JEANNE. Yes, indeed!

BEATRICE [*to* MME. GRIBERT]. Mamma, please come and fix my hair.

MME. GRIBERT. Yes, my angel. Sit right down.

[MME. GRIBERT *arranges her daughter's hair.*]

MME. PONTHIONNE [*to* LEONIE]. Look and see if my skirt is hanging right. Look all around. You'll have to get down on the floor.

[LEONIE *occupies herself with her mother's dress. Enter* SABINE.]

SABINE [*to the* PONTHIONNES]. Can I help you in any way?

MME. PONTHIONNE. Thanks; my daughter is attending to me.

SABINE [*to the* GRIBERTS]. Or you?

BEATRICE. No, thank you. I have mamma

SABINE [*to* MME. GRIBERT]. So, my dear, you're going to sit out another night on a ballroom chair, nodding and yawning until dawn? This makes the fifth in succession, doesn't it?

BEATRICE. Oh! Mamma knows very well how to go to bye-low in a corner without letting any one see her.

MME. PONTHIONNE. We really must be getting on.

SABINE [*to* MME. PONTHIONNE]. Don't forget to say good-night to mamma, will you? She is busy looking after everybody else, but she loves to be remembered.

MME. PONTHIONNE. I shouldn't dream of going without seeing her. Good-night, my dear—— Come, Leonie.

LEONIE [*to* SABINE]. Good-night, Madame.

[*Exeunt centre.*

MME. GRIBERT [*nodding toward* BEATRICE].

Have you complimented her on her new pearl necklace?

SABINE. More jewelry! What did you pay for it?

BEATRICE. Nothing! I exchanged some things I already had.

SABINE [*kissing the two women one after the other*]. Well, try and keep the clothes on your back, at least! [*To* BEATRICE.] Go on to your ball, you spoiled child!

MME. GRIBERT [*pointing to the smoking-room*]. Don't let my husband stay here all night. He has some work to do before he goes to bed.

SABINE. What? You don't even let poor Monsieur Gribert rest at night?

MME. GRIBERT [*pointing to* BEATRICE]. Well, she has to have a dowry.

[*Exeunt* MME. GRIBERT *and* BEATRICE, *right*, MARAVON *enters left.*]

SABINE [*pointing to the two who have just gone*]. Ah! my dear Maravon, what an absurd friend I have there!

MARAVON. Mme. Gribert, you mean?

SABINE. Haven't you noticed that she is beginning to look like a governess? I suppose it's because she has been doing a governess' work for so long

that she has ceased to have any personal existence. She no longer cares to possess anything of her own, everything belongs to her daughter, and her husband works his fingers to the bone to pay for Beatrice's dresses, while Beatrice lords it over both of them in a way that is beginning to be just a trifle odious.

MARAVON. I'm afraid I don't agree with you, Madame. With naïvely natural beings, like these, I enjoy watching the family wheels function with such simplicity. People of this kind conform to the law which begins by demanding of the mother the flesh of her flesh, often her beauty, her health, and, if need be, her life, for the formation of the child. And then, for the profit of the newer generation, Nature exerts herself to despoil the old. She exacts without stint from the parents in the shape of labors, anxieties, expenses, gifts, and sacrifices, all of their vital forces to equip, arm, and decorate their sons and daughters who are descending into the plain of the future. Take my own case, for instance. There was the question of my son's position in life. Didier was able to persuade me very quickly that my property would be better placed, for the future, in his hands. To show you that Mme. Gribert and her daughter are merely following out a tradition of the remotest

antiquity, if you can endure the pedantry of an old college professor, I will give you an example from the classics.

SABINE. Oh! Please do.

MARAVON. You have probably never heard of the "Lampadophories," have you? Well, on certain solemn occasions the citizens of Athens placed themselves at regular intervals, forming a sort of chain through the city. The first one lighted a torch at an altar, ran to the second and passed to him the light, and he to a third who ran to the fourth and so on, from hand to hand. Each one of the chain ran onward without ever looking back and without any idea except to keep the flame alight and pass it on to the next man. Then, breathlessly stopping, each saw nothing but the progress of the flaming light, as each followed it with his eyes, his then useless anxiety, and superfluous vows. In that Trail of the Torch has been seen a symbol of all the generations of the earth, though it is not I, but my very ancient friend Plato and the good poet Lucretius, who made the analogy.

SABINE. That is not at all my idea of family relations. From my point of view, receiving life entails as great an obligation as giving it. There is a certain

sort of link which makes the obligations counterbalance. Since Nature has not made it possible for children to bring themselves into the world, of their own accord, I say that it was her intention to impose upon them a debt to those who give them life.

MARAVON. They absolve that debt by giving life in turn to their children.

SABINE. They absolve it by filial piety which has been the inspiration of many deeds of heroism as you seem to forget.

MARAVON. Pshaw! When Troy was burning Æneas carried out his father upon his shoulders, but in these days any fireman does as much for people he has never even seen before. Mlle. de Sombreuil drank a goblet of human blood to preserve the life of a marquis; but who would not overcome the disgust of such a moment to save from death—one's concierge? Cheap engravings have popularized the devotion of a woman whose aged father was dying of hunger in prison: she managed to gain access to his cell and nourished him with milk from her own breasts. And yet, where is the nurse who would not, in such a way, give food to a whole squadron in captivity?

SABINE. It is always easy to jest.

MARAVON. Suppose you give me some examples of your sublime traits.

SABINE. I have not your erudition.

MARAVON. No, you see human nature pats itself on the back and tells itself that it isn't such a bad sort of child after all. But it is a bad child from birth, just as it is from birth a good parent. Read your Ten Commandments: not a word about the duty of parents toward children! Why? Because it was unnecessary. Because it is the natural instinct of every living thing to care for and protect its young. But the duty toward parents, that was not taken for granted, that did not go without saying: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land." There is the injunction, and also as a bait, the promise of a reward for mankind of the earth earthy. Believe me, dear lady, filial gratitude is not a spontaneous emotion, it is an effort of civilization, a fragile attempt at virtue.

SABINE. Perhaps you will let me take my own case as an example, as I am both mother and daughter. I think I might be supposed to know what it is to love my child.

MARAVON. Say, rather, that you have achieved the perfection of solicitude.

SABINE. In short, if I criticise certain maternal exaggerations, that does not prevent my feeling that if necessary I would go to the stake without hesitation in order to save Marie-Jeanne any serious pain. But I love my mother with equal tenderness and without that effort of will you speak of, and to save her from peril of any sort I would gladly give my life, I assure you.

MARAVON. Indeed! You are three excellent souls rolled together in one mass of tender illusions. You all think you understand one another, and you don't even understand yourselves. You yourself are ignorant of your worth as a mother, and you probably overestimate your worth as a daughter. These things are not learned in the harmonies of life, but in the discords of strife and the cries wrung from one's very vitals.

[MME. PONTHIONNE *and* LEONIE *cross the stage from the door in the centre to the door on the right. They are wearing their wraps.*]

MME. PONTHIONNE. Good-night. [*Exeunt.*

SABINE. Now take her, for instance. Can you imagine any cry being wrung from her vitals? What has she to do with your laws of nature? Is that a case of a mother who sacrifices herself or of a daughter

who is sacrificed? Which of the two is carrying the torch you were talking about!

MARAVON. Exceptions test but do not destroy the rule. I know that the light of mother love is sometimes eclipsed in a pleasure-loving woman when the shadow of a daughter looms up darkly before her, but these resistant feminine types, these forceful temperaments, confirm the truth of my argument by making the best of grandmothers. How many times have I seen elderly coquettes take the keenest delight in this renewal of life in their children's children and settle down for the rest of their existence as youthful grannies! But here comes Monsieur Gribert. I'll give him my place beside you and go and say good-night to Mme. Fontenais. [*Exit centre.*

Enter GRIBERT, *left.*

SABINE. Well, Monsieur Gribert, you don't deign to reappear until there is no one left in there?

GRIBERT. Oh! I am not the very last, dear Madame; Monsieur Stangy is still smoking with his eyes fixed on the ceiling. He quite captivated me by his account of his American methods of travelling. Do you know, he is not even going back to his house to-night to put on his travelling clothes?

SABINE [*with an air of simple curiosity*]. What do you mean, "to-night?" Where is he going?

GRIBERT. Why, he is going back to America.

SABINE [*troubled*]. No! He hasn't said anything to me. You must be mistaken!

GRIBERT. Excuse me, he is leaving right away. He will spend the night in a sleeper and in due time will clothe himself in an everyday suit which he will find in a valise at the station. So you will see him depart from your drawing-room for Louisiana clad in an evening coat and a white tie.

SABINE [*nervously*]. I shall be curious to see that!

GRIBERT. I always follow the ancient French custom of wearing my very oldest things in the train [*looking at his cuffs*]. So, you see, I could easily travel in my evening clothes. That's the result of having a charming young daughter to educate and marry off.

SABINE. Your wife and daughter went quite a while ago.

GRIBERT. Then I'll follow them. [*Exit, right.*

Enter STANGY, *left.*

SABINE. I've just been told that you are here to say good-bye, that you are going back to America.

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STANGY. Yes, I am going.

SABINE. Really and truly?

STANGY. Really and truly.

SABINE. But why?

STANGY. There is nothing left for me to do, since you refuse positively to be my wife.

SABINE. Have I rejected you so decidedly as that?

STANGY. Oh! not at all! You have always done it with the most extreme delicacy. The first time you steered our conversation into the channels of reminiscence, and we talked of the days when my parents sent me to school in France and your parents were kind enough to look out for me. That gave you the opportunity of warning me that, since we had been friends from childhood, I should be running something of a risk by imagining that my feeling for you was anything more than that of a brother for a sister. The last time I asked you to marry me you defended yourself against my burning declarations by begging me to think the matter over, without promising me anything. So, although I am rather dense, I realize at last that you have been trying to let me down easily.

SABINE. You really think that! Why don't you say at once that you detest me? If you were not

prompted by some such feeling you would hardly have made all your plans to go away without saying anything to me about it. It was brutal of you!

STANGY. I admit it was unkind, but consider my side of the case. I left my home intending to spend a month, or at most two, refreshing my memories of Paris. I found you again, a widow, free and full of the old seductive charm. At once all my longing for you awakened and I hoped to have you for my wife. I have been asking you off and on now for nearly a year, and for nearly a year you have been making me suffer——

SABINE. My dear Stangy!

STANGY. Every time that I have threatened to go back to my own country you have disarmed me with a glance or a smile, and I have remained at your feet, conquered. I was stupid, but at last I realized that I should never get away from you if I let you know that I was going. Now, in this saddest of moments, if I find myself strong in my resolution to depart, it is not merely because in half an hour I shall be on my way, but because I am now under obligation to go.

SABINE. How is that?

STANGY. When I asked you before to link your

life with mine, I told you I would sell all my property out there and come here to live where all your interests, your duties, and your habits lie.

SABINE. Yes, well?

STANGY. Now that I am seeking hard work to help me to forget, I have found a means of tripling my property. A vast estate bordering on mine is in litigation in New Orleans. It is considered unsaleable on account of taxes and difficulties about titles, but the clearing up of a thing like that, which I can see through without disaster, would prevent my putting off my return any longer. So I have been negotiating the purchase and have given the order for the transfer to be made right away.

SABINE. I have been listening all along with the idea that your absence would be a long one. I feel resigned, however, because, after all, the future at least seems safeguarded.

STANGY. The future? What do you mean?

SABINE. Don't keep asking me questions! Stop playing the injured male! See, I am smiling at you, and you've said that I could always dispose of an irresistible argument with a smile. You will go immediately to a telegraph office, there is one quite near here that is open all night, and you will send a

telegram which will easily arrive in time, countermanding your orders.

STANGY. Yes, even now I should still have time enough, just about time enough. But I shall not do it. I want to get away from the sight of your face which tortures me, from your presence which enthrals my will and draws me without ceasing, but which leads to nothing! No! You shall charm me no longer!

SABINE. Ah! you force me to an explanation, you compel me to tear down barriers without waiting for the outcome I have so wished for! Am I really such a terrible hypocrite or is it that you are so blind as not to have seen that my feelings for you are even as yours are for me?

STANGY. What! You care for me! You love me! Can you mean that?

SABINE. Yes.

STANGY. But why have you waited so long to tell me?

SABINE. I confess I have tried to put you off in spite of yourself, but you must not reproach me for it.

STANGY. Ah! my dearest! You may trust me.

SABINE. You know that a woman is almost never

perfectly frank except when it is impossible for her to be otherwise.

STANGY. But what reason could you have had for deceiving me? Were you putting me to the test? Did you doubt me?

SABINE. Oh! No! No! My reasons were entirely on my daughter's account, but they were sacred to me.

STANGY. I don't understand.

SABINE. Oh! Stangy, can't you see? In my daughter's eyes I am still the only person in the world. Her soul is only just beginning to blossom forth into larger sensibilities, so how could I all at once instal a rival to her devotion, how could I let her see that henceforth she would have to share my affection with another person? There was no other way than to deceive you, so I avoided anything that could have fed your impatience and pretended to be trivial, to be even cold. The days went by, till presently a month had passed and then a year, and I began to hope that things could go on as they were until Marie-Jeanne was married. I lived like the old people who do not know that their hour is upon them. I would not let myself think that my dream might die at any moment. I was living, but

how many, many times did I watch the sun go down, knowing that it was taking with it another day of my youth! I suppose you think me a foolish egoist not to put myself at one with the age which every day disputes with me one more of my modest store of attractions.

STANGY. Oh, no, Sabine! You only make me adore you all the more. As for your daughter, she shall find in me a stepfather of whom she will never be able to complain.

SABINE. Oh! I'm sure if she had any idea I cared for you, she would not hesitate to tell me to marry you! But all the same, it would be taking advantage of her generosity. A mother's duty is to protect from cruel awakenings the innocent, unsuspicious spirit of her child. I have counted over and over again the numberless little happinesses that I should destroy if I severed the bond between Marie-Jeanne and myself: our little talks in my room, morning and night, with our hair down, the embraces of her white arms which from time immemorial she has declared were made only to put around my neck! Could I be the first to do anything to destroy these virgin acts of my own child and bring a look of chaste and jealous reproach into her eyes?

STANGY. While you were thinking of all those things, my dear friend, you forgot what I was suffering, I who when I left you here often spent half the night walking up and down under your windows. But that is all over. I make no more complaint nor do I criticise your scruples, excessive as they seem to me, now that we are going to cast them aside.

SABINE. You no longer doubt my wish to become your wife. You must know what joy and what happiness your friendship has brought into my life which has had so little of joy and happiness and which, without you, would be destined to draw to its close, sombre and mute, stifled of all its need of loving. But even though I have let you see how dear you are to me, I must tell you that I do not feel any more free to marry you now than I did before.

STANGY. What? You tell me that you love me and yet you are going to put me off again!

SABINE. I have told you my secret in order to enlist your help in my task. Can't you see that I must do nothing that could possibly injure Marie-Jeanne's chances? She is my only child, and I have never lost sight of this fact since the day she was born. She had nothing from her father, everything she will have must come from me. Her marriage

portion is all arranged for and our lawyer alone can say what will be hers later on. But society looks at these things differently. Once the mother remarries, in view of the possibility of other children, the daughter's value is immediately reduced by half, by two thirds, three quarters.

STANGY. My fortune is considerably greater than yours. If you were to give me a child, several children, there would still be ample for all. Your daughter's dowry should remain intact in any case.

SABINE. I know that between frank people like ourselves everything could be arranged fairly, law or no law, and if Marie-Jeanne were already married, I feel sure that if this evening I placed my hand in yours, the man who had married her would not run the risk of any unfair treatment. But things are not like that. My daughter is not married nor even engaged. If I were to marry you right away, should I not be exposing her to the perhaps insurmountable distrust of the family which she might eventually have the chance of entering? These strangers might object that the understanding between you and me was irregular, that possible children could overthrow the arrangements we had made, or even that you and I, should a child be born to us, might change our own

minds in the matter. And supposing that Marie-Jeanne is already in love? And if interfering parents should separate from her a devoted lover who was also an obedient son? Then I should see her weeping and alone, and all because I had married you. And it would end by my having to agree to a less advantageous match for her than what we had hoped. Oh! No! Do not ask me to run any such risk of doing my child a wrong, of causing her unhappiness! My dear, I know only too well that fond mothers make mistakes where their daughters are concerned, but what I have been saying to you is simple motherly honesty. Don't look at me so severely, as though I were quite wrong.

STANGY. How much longer are you going to make me suffer this time?

SABINE. Heavens! Now you are going back to that again!

STANGY. You have convinced me sufficiently that you love your daughter differently from the way you love me.

SABINE. Why make comparisons? I love you both. Oh! please listen to me! How can I fix a date? If I were to say in a year, I should be untrue to all I have hoped for the welfare of Marie-Jeanne,

for her health, and even what I have hoped for for myself, I may say. The poor child is only seventeen. Can I put away from me so soon the perfume of that sweet flowerlike soul? You would not have me thrust my child prematurely into the arms of some boy? When she leaves me of her own accord, the wrench will be painful enough. Ah! Stay near me to sustain me, to console me, to intoxicate me!

STANGY. I will not bind myself for another indefinite time, for another impossible and humiliating term of waiting. My heart and soul have too long been rent with pain; you must heal them now or I go to seek balm elsewhere as I have already told you.

A servant enters, right.

SERVANT. Monsieur Stangy's man has come with the carriage from the station.

SABINE. Ah!

STANGY [*to the servant*]. Very well. [*Exit servant.*] My second reason for staying alive is calling me. It will be my resurrection since I am still young enough to be born again in the dignity and the struggle of work.

SABINE. Do not make an irreparable breach between us, I implore you! Send the telegram!

STANGY. My last word is this: I want you, God knows I do, but I will wait no longer.

SABINE. And I must say over again the same thing: were there only one chance in the world that our marriage would be an obstacle in the path of my child's happiness, that one chance would be one too many! It would shatter at birth all my joys and——

STANGY. When I go through that door, if it is not to send the telegram, all is over between us. You will not be able to call me back nor I to return. In a few hours I shall be in Belgium on my way to England, from where I set sail. By to-morrow morning there will be no way on earth of preventing what will keep me on the other side of the Atlantic for the rest of my life.

SABINE. I have told you all that I have thought and all that I have felt. You wring my heart without changing an iota of what I consider my duty! I have not the right! I ought not! I cannot!

STANGY. Good-bye!

SABINE. Oh, don't go yet!

STANGY. I have to be at the train in twenty minutes.

SABINE. You will let me hear from you? You will write to me?

STANCY. Not a word! If you write to me, I shall destroy your letters unopened. Put me out of your life and let me put you out of mine!

SABINE. You will come back? I shall see you again some day?

STANCY. Never! [*He starts to go.*]

SABINE. Oh! Oh! Stancy!

STANCY [*starting to come back*]. Well?

SABINE [*after a moment of struggle within herself*]. No! No! [*She falls into a chair.*] Oh! Marie-Jeanne! [*Exit* STANCY *right.*

Enter MARIE JEANNE, *centre.*

MARIE JEANNE. You are by yourself, Mother?

SABINE. Yes.

MARIE JEANNE. Then we can have a little talk. Have you a headache?

SABINE. I'm not feeling very well, but don't worry. Come, kiss me, hold me tight, tell me that you love me.

MARIE JEANNE. I adore you!

SABINE. My darling child! There, now, you see I am all right again.

MARIE JEANNE. Really and truly? Your head doesn't ache any more?

SABINE. No.

MARIE-JEANNE. Then I can talk without bothering you?

SABINE. Have you something very particular to say to me?

MARIE-JEANNE. First, you tell me that you love me, too.

SABINE. Ah! little one, you will never know how much!

MARIE-JEANNE. On the contrary, I shall know right away. Now, hug me tightly, I want to feel your heart beating against mine. Put your ear close to my mouth —— Mother, dear, I'm in love with Didier Maravon.

SABINE. What! What! Marie-Jeanne! What are you telling me?

MARIE-JEANNE. Didier and I love each other.

SABINE. You two in love! You mean that you are just very good friends!

MARIE-JEANNE. Don't pretend you don't understand. Didier wants to marry me.

SABINE. So this was what you had to say to me. Well, this young man shows very good taste in thinking of you for his future wife, but very bad taste in making a declaration of his feelings to such a young girl.

Marie-Jeanne. Ah! Mother, dear, don't joke about it.

Sarine. Nothing is further from my thoughts, I assure you.

Marie-Jeanne. I promised Didier that I would get your consent.

Sarine. Indeed!

Marie-Jeanne. And your decision will make me perfectly happy or terribly unhappy.

Sarine. My child, you have explained yourself in a way that forces me to reply in the same tone, instead of sending you to bed, as I feel strongly tempted to do. I have nothing against Didier except that he has made love to you too soon. You are not strong, you know nothing of the world, and you are far too young to think of getting married. All I can say to you now is that you may go on seeing one another, which is a good deal and which will teach you to control your feelings for each other. And later on, perhaps, a good deal later on, we shall see.

Marie-Jeanne. But that isn't the answer I promised Didier! He went away with the hope that to-morrow he would be my fiancé, and soon my husband. You must give your consent!

SABINE. Go to bed. I'm tired out and I must get some sleep. So must you.

MARIE-JEANNE. How can I go to sleep knowing that such a disappointment is in store for Didier? Oh, Mother, don't make me tell him that! I haven't the courage, he loves me too dearly.

SABINE. You're out of your senses, you silly child!

MARIE-JEANNE. Why do you speak in such a hard way? There's no reason why we shouldn't love each other.

SABINE. Not another word! [*Calling to* MME. FONTENAIS.] Oh! are you there, Mamma? What are you doing? Come in here and see this infant who wants to publish her banns with Didier Maravon to-morrow.

Enter MME. FONTENAIS, *centre.*

MME. FONTENAIS. What, Marie-Jeanne! What do you think of that! [*To* SABINE.] Do you like the idea?

SABINE. Try and bring your granddaughter to her senses. Tell her that she doesn't even know her lessons yet and that one does not play the *grande dame* in society when one knows French history only down to 1610.

MARIE-JEANNE [*to* MME. FONTENAIS]. Will you tell me rather, how old mother was when she was married?

MME. FONTENAIS. Let me see. She was just about your age, my dear,

MARIE-JEANNE. You hear that, Mother?

SABINE. I was wrong to do it, and the wretched life I led more than justified the good advice that people gave me to wait.

MME. FONTENAIS. Gave you in vain. [*To* MARIE-JEANNE.] But there are certain things, little one, that we must put clearly before you, serious things that you have probably lost sight of. Didier's standing in the world is not yet secure, and it would be wiser to wait until he is thoroughly established.

MARIE-JEANNE. You want me to let him go through his years of struggle all alone, to stay at a distance until he is on the road to riches, and then say: "Here I am!" No! Don't ask me to do that, I should be ashamed of it to the last day of my life!

MME. FONTENAIS [*to* SABINE]. There's something in what she says.

SABINE. Just exactly the sort of reasoning that led me to my ruin.

MME. FONTENAIS. We shall have to be more

careful with your daughter than we were with you. When it comes to the point of signing a marriage contract, no matter with whom it is, I shall insist that any property which Marie-Jeanne has or will have be put in trust. [*To* MARIE-JEANNE.] That means that neither you nor your husband will ever be able to lay a finger on a penny of the capital. I suppose you don't know whether your sighing swain would stick at such an agreement?

MARIE-JEANNE. He would sign it with his eyes shut! He has never as much as mentioned money in making our plans. Grandmother, you have often talked with Didier, you know how noble his character is, and how generous his nature! Be on our side, won't you? Give us your help!

MME. FONTENAIS. Indeed, Sabine, all the objections I have made seem put aside.

MARIE-JEANNE. Mother, dear, you have always been kind and sweet to me, be so now, won't you? My heart is breaking, do not make me suffer any longer!

SABINE. Do you imagine I want to see you suffer? Think, Marie-Jeanne, only a moment ago you were still to me a little child, and your whole existence was my love for you and your love for me. And suddenly

you confront me with the last decision that I shall probably ever make in your life: to keep that life with me a little longer or to give it into the care of a stranger. In that revelation you show me that my kisses, my caresses, and the loving nest where I have enfolded you are no longer enough for you, and that nothing of me can hold you. Ah! I did not think this would come so soon!

MARIE-JEANNE. But I shall love you just the same! I don't deserve such cruel reproaches! When you were so impatient to marry my father, did it make you care any the less for the people who had brought you up? Were you not the same loving daughter to grandmother?

SABINE. You make me see now just the sort of daughter I was. I understand it all now in the daughter I have. It is exactly the same.

MARIE-JEANNE. Mother, dear, don't keep saying no, I implore you. You will only have another child to love and adore you. Oh! do say yes, Mother, I beg you!

SABINE [*at the end of her resistance*]. My nerves won't stand any more! My heart can no longer keep you in spite of yourself!

MARIE-JEANNE. Then you no longer say no?

Do you mean it? Do you really mean it? [SABINE *makes an affirmative gesture.*] Oh! Mother, how happy you make me! I could never tell you! I could never kiss you enough!

SABINE. Do not thank me too much, not too much! Be satisfied, but do not say any more!

MME. FONTENAIS. Come, Sabine, when your daughter goes away you will not be entirely alone, you will still have your mother.

SABINE. Yes.

MARIE-JEANNE. Oh! Yes! Grandmother and you will be kinder than ever, won't you?

SABINE. You married! Little Marie-Jeanne married! Why, it seems so—so comical!

[*She bursts into tears.*]

Curtain

ACT II

ACT II

SCENE: *An office situated on the ground floor and furnished like a drawing-room. At the back is a door opening on a garden, at the left a door opening on a drive, and on the right a third door communicating with the apartment.*

The curtain rises discovering MARIE-JEANNE *coming from the apartment with* LEONIE, *to whom she has been showing it.*

MARIE-JEANNE. And this, you see, is Didier's office. It opens on to the garden; you can't see the stables but they are there behind those trees. We have only two horses, which really isn't enough for all we have to do, but we have to be careful just at first.

LEONIE. With everything so convenient, you will get along beautifully at Boulogne-sur-Seine.

MARIE-JEANNE. It was important that Didier should not have a long trip back and forth from his work. [*Pointing to the door, left.*] From that door,

which opens on our drive down to the road, he can be at his factory in five minutes.

LEONIE. What did your mother say when you moved out of the flat she furnished for you near her home, to come out here, so far away from her?

MARIE-JEANNE. Poor dear mother! What a fuss she made! She treated me like an ungrateful wretch, and among other things she accused me of making her commit all sorts of sacrifices I'd never heard of. She said she had refused to marry again, four years ago, out of love for me.

LEONIE. Was it Monsieur Stangy?

MARIE-JEANNE. How did you know?

LEONIE. Why, when you and I were still girls, I guessed it from remarks here and there that I heard mamma and papa make.

MARIE-JEANNE. What sort of remarks?

LEONIE. You won't be angry? My father said one day: "Goodness knows I'm not curious, but I should like to know how far things have gone between Mme. Ravel and Monsieur Stangy." That threw mamma into fits. "It's just like you," she cried, "to imagine all sorts of things just because a man is polite to a woman! I believe every man in the world has a nasty mind!"—— But I'm staying much

longer than I intended. I really must go, my babies are waiting for me.

MARIE-JEANNE [*going to the door with her*]. How lucky you are to have them!

LEONIE. Three children in three years? I don't call that luck!

MARIE-JEANNE. I've given up hope of ever having any.

LEONIE. Now don't you worry, my dear. It will happen when you least expect it. That's my experience. [*Exit* LEONIE.

Enter DIDIER, *left. He looks worried.*

DIDIER. My father hasn't come?

MARIE-JEANNE. No. I didn't know you expected him to-day. You don't look well, dear. What makes you so tired? Where are you coming from?

DIDIER. I had some business with the bank and I had to go to the four corners of Paris.

MARIE-JEANNE. It was hardly worth while for us to move out here to be near your work if you have to spend all your time on the road. You've gone in to Paris every day now, for a fortnight, and sometimes twice a day.

DIDIER. Well, it wasn't for pleasure, I assure you.

MARIE-JEANNE. No, but an excess of zeal, perhaps? Yes, I can see that rubs you the wrong way. It always does when I preach moderation. Why are you overdoing things so, when you told me a year ago that we were already rich?

DIDIER. In business one never knows what one will have to-morrow.

MARIE-JEANNE. Ah! with a man like you, I feel no apprehension. If anything worries me, it is that you are doing too much and I'm afraid you may fall ill, and I love you too dearly to let you do that. Think of it, just now I was envying Leonie her babies! And yet when I am at the height of wanting a little one, who should be yours as well as mine, I often tremble for fear that if I did have a child I might love it more than I love you! When your arms are around me like this I feel all my craving for motherhood satisfied to the depth of my being, because you are to me both husband and child in one.

DIDIER. Marie-Jeanne, you will always love me like that, won't you, even if you should lose your illusions about my worth and my capacity? Ah! if I could only outdo your vows and make you the happiest of women!

MARIE-JEANNE. I am the happiest of women except when I see you looking worried or tired. Heavens! I'm less serious than you are. I must be, since I make all sorts of futile plans. What I should like would be that, while we are still young, to take those wonderful trips we talked about. Do you remember, in a yacht? Ah! to be able to go everywhere with just you, to see all the far countries and strange sights—that is my dream. May I dream it?

DIDIER. Yes, dear, dream on. Dreams are the best things that life holds.

MARIE-JEANNE. We'll stay on here for twelve, say fifteen, years, until your fortune is made and you can retire. Then you'll be decorated——

DIDIER. Ah! That's something I'm far from even dreaming of.

MARIE-JEANNE. It has its effect upon everybody and the glances of everybody. When I see a man on the street with a red ribbon, I can't help looking out of the corner of my eye to see if it is the real thing. When two men are talking together in a drawing-room, I always notice that the one who is decorated looks the other straight in the eyes, and the one who has not the red ribbon keeps his eyes about the level of the other's buttonhole. Indeed, when we are at

the theatre or in the Bois, at the seashore or the springs, I always pretend that people are saying, "She's not bad looking, that little woman who is always with her husband who has the decoration." Ah! to let people see me with you, to be every moment with you, that is the end of my dreams and my existence! I know I'm in your way here now and that I ought to go, but I just cannot! You'll have to send me away!

DIDIER. I have a terrible lot to do. Come back later on and we'll dream some more.

MARIE-JEANNE. In a little while, then.

[*Exit* MARIE-JEANNE, *right.*

Enter MARAVON, *centre.*

DIDIER. Father!

MARAVON. I executed your errand as well as I could.

DIDIER. Did you make my mother-in-law understand that it was not my fault?

MARAVON. I went there to bear witness for you and to speak in your favor as you could not do yourself. I explained everything: the multiplicity of events, all of which have gone against you, the absconding of an associate with a considerable sum of

money, involving you in long and expensive litigation, the unforeseen failure of one of your best customers, which in a day deprived you of a large amount of business. I told of our fruitless visits to financiers, some of whom preferred seeing you go to the wall in order to make pickings for themselves, and others who demanded a guarantee from your family. I took care to add that that guarantee could not come from me since, in the event of your failure, with the exception of my pension, everything I had would go.

DIDIER. Was the grandmother there?

MARAVON. Yes.

DIDIER. What did she say?

MARAVON. When I named the sum that was needed, when I said "three hundred thousand francs," Mme. Fontenais grew pale. You know, her heart isn't very strong—— You told me to explain your condition but not to ask for assistance, but you will soon know what they are going to do as they are on their way here now.

DIDIER. Here? To-day? And Marie-Jeanne doesn't know a thing about it yet!

MARAVON. What do you mean? I told the two women that while I was explaining the matter to them you were telling Marie-Jeanne.

DIDIER. I didn't have the courage! Hearing that child prattle about her castles in Spain, I could not keep my agreement—— Besides, it can all be arranged without troubling her.

MARAVON. You could hardly conceal from your wife that you were making such a large demand upon her patrimony.

DIDIER. No, I suppose not. I seem to be losing the most elementary notions of conduct.

MARAVON. There is no reason why I should not be the one to break the bad news to Marie-Jeanne.

DIDIER. I don't know, Father. You have made me feel that I have a duty toward her that I ought not to shrink from, sad and humiliating as it is.

MARAVON. I'm afraid that the two of you would make matters even worse than before, you in your present upset state and she with her impulsive ways. You would be trying to outdo each other in conjugal sentiment. You had better trust to my paternal and measured language.

DIDIER. Very well, I'll leave it to you.

MARAVON. Shall I find her in her room?

DIDIER. She has stopped in the drawing-room.

[MARIE-JEANNE *is heard singing outside.*] You hear her? Singing! [*Exit* MARAVON, *right.*

Enter SABINE, *centre.*

DIDIER. Oh! Are you here?

SABINE. You are alone?

DIDIER. My wife is with my father.

SABINE. That is good. In her arms I should lose the small amount of sense I have left, and I need every bit of it to talk with you. I was so dumbfounded by what your father just told us, so taken off my feet by the suddenness of it all, that I forgot to ask him some of the most important things.

DIDIER. I understood from my father that Mme. Fontenais was coming here with you.

SABINE. Mamma is not far behind. At her age and in her condition of health, a terrible shock like this makes it impossible for her to move quickly. When we got out at the station she insisted on my leaving her and hurrying on. I have not come with recriminations, I only want to know. But I want to tell you right away that I do not believe you have been imprudent or indiscreet, but simply that luck has been against you. Let us begin at that point. Tell me just how things stand at present.

DIDIER. I am at the point where my affairs can be saved entirely or completely lost. You may have my accounts, my books, my correspondence examined by any expert you please, and you will see that what I am asking is not a gift in any sense, but merely a sum to tide me over a tight place and which, when things settle down again, will bring prosperity in having assured my prosperity. It is not on my own account, please believe me, that I am so anxious to go on. In my struggles I have already seen such villainies, such dishonesty among business men, and I have faced such cruel discouragements that I would willingly give up the whole thing for good and all if I had only myself to consider. But there is Marie-Jeanne, with her disposition of a happy child and her little extravagances of a miniature woman of the world; it is for her, in order to save her from humiliations and sorrows, from having to go without things she wants, that I will not give up!

SABINE. My dear boy, we are all considering Marie-Jeanne before ourselves. We all love her so dearly that we often feel that we almost hate one another, and——

DIDIER. I protest, I never had any such feeling against you!

SABINE. So? Then I can only accuse myself of having nourished hostilities and jealousies when I felt you were usurping my place in my daughter's affections. But now that the question is not one of sharing her affections but of protecting her against a peril, you must believe that I am a sincere and ardent ally.

DIDIER. Your assistance is absolutely essential to obtain from Mme. Fontenais the three hundred thousand francs that I need and which have been refused me everywhere else. If I am turned away from this last door at which I am knocking, all that I have spent four years in building up will fall to the ground and I shall be a bankrupt.

SABINE. Oh!

DIDIER. I shall be seized by the sheriff——

SABINE. Oh! My God! Bankrupt! Sheriff! Those words that in the hideous old days used to burn into my ears like red-hot gimlets, shall I have to endure the torture of hearing them again in the home of my child! But Maravon assured me that Marie-Jeanne's dowry has not been involved.

DIDIER. Naturally not. It is intact in the vaults of the Bank of France.

SABINE. In that case, whatever happens, your household will not be entirely broken up.

DIDIER. My position will be more humiliating than if it were broken up. Think of it! I shall have brought down to poverty this person and that, but my marriage contract compels me to remain a man with an income! I shall have ruined others and yet not been ruined myself! Ah! you do not know me if you imagine that I resign myself in a craven way to becoming insolvent or, worse than that, to passing for a thief in the eyes of people who have had confidence in my word and in the validity of my signature. God! How I should hate to have a thing like that always on my mind!

SABINE. What are you going to do? You don't answer—— You frighten me!

DIDIER. I'm sorry, Mother! I said more than I should have said.

SABINE. No, Didier, it was I who began, as soon as I got here, to make you go into details about the situation, and now I see it in all its horror. I know now that there is not only the question of putting your business again on a firm basis, of assuring you a substantial balance at your bank, but the more serious one of saving your very home. For that, the

sum you ask, no matter how large it is, must be found, and I shall do my utmost in your behalf.

DIDIER. I thank you more than I can say for your kindness! God knows I need it. Have you any idea how Mme. Fontenais feels about the matter?

SABINE. She has not said anything definite as yet. We have only exchanged reflections, regrets, and jeremiads.

DIDIER. If you don't mind, when she comes, we had better not put off any longer finding out what she is going to do.

SABINE. I think it would be better if we did not run the risk of giving mamma the impression that you and I were ranged together against her to get the money. I don't mean that I doubt her generosity, but she is sometimes a little suspicious, and I don't want to run the risk. You'd better let me talk to her alone.

DIDIER. By all means. I'll go right away. They need me at the factory, anyhow. I leave my fate and Marie-Jeanne's peace of mind in your hands. [*Exit right.*

Enter MME. FONTENAIS, *centre.*

SABINE. Oh! Mamma! Come, sit down here.

MME. FONTENAIS. Neither your daughter nor your son-in-law is here?

SABINE. Your granddaughter and her husband have left it to me to make an appeal to your generosity.

MME. FONTENAIS. They don't expect to get three hundred thousand francs from me?

SABINE. It is asked only as a loan. The money will not be lost, merely invested.

MME. FONTENAIS. In excellent hands if one can judge by the present condition of Didier's affairs.

SABINE. Have his books examined by any one in whom you have confidence. They are not asking you for anything except at a good rate of interest.

MME. FONTENAIS. Have his books examined? I shall certainly do nothing of the kind. I don't care to start any of those inquiries that always leave you more puzzled at the end than you were at the beginning. That's the way your husband cost us some five hundred thousand francs. When your father died, after thirty-five years of hard work, we were worth a million and a quarter. How much was left when I had given Marie-Jeanne her dowry of a hundred and fifty thousand francs? Something like six hundred thousand. Well, that's not a great deal, but it is at least enough to enable us to live respectably.

SABINE. You speak of living respectably; that is just the question. I have to tell you now that even though you should have to utilize half your fortune in the cause of your grandchildren, it is a risk you cannot well avoid. The matter is now one of preventing the name that Marie-Jeanne bears from being dragged through the bankruptcy court. Do you understand that? You did not expect such an outcome, I am sure, when you began by opposing me with such a sharp refusal. I did not dream of it until Didier opened my eyes just now. We women have not such keen eyes as men when it comes to perceiving a point of honor.

MME. FONTENAIS. Oh! Yes! I understand all that talk, I've heard it all before. When men get into difficulties they always say to us "My honor!—— Your sex has not the same delicacy as ours—— In order to rehabilitate our man's honor, which we have jeopardized, just give us some of your woman's money."

SABINE. You would speak less severely if you had seen with what noble indignation just now Didier repulsed the idea of being unable to fulfill his engagements. He even hinted that he would kill himself.

MME. FONTENAIS. Yes, I've heard that before,

too; your sweet husband used to play the same game. I never told you about it, but often, when notes were about to fall due, he would come to your father and threaten suicide. Your father gave and gave until he had paid out half a million. And then, one day when your husband again talked of putting an end to himself, your father said, "Very well, go do it!" And *did* he do it? The good-for-nothing!

SABINE. Mamma! He is dead!

MME. FONTENAIS. Yes, one fine day, of pleurisy!

SABINE. I hope, of course, that Didier would do nothing so terrible as to make my daughter a widow, but other dreadful things are imminent. Only a moment ago I was imagining that I saw the creditors in here laying their brutal hands on all the pretty things that Marie-Jeanne has bought and had given her and of which she has grown so fond! I saw them all being hustled into the street and disposed of——

MME. FONTENAIS. Your mind is altogether too far-seeing! If, in the course of events, any such thing were likely to occur, I should certainly buy in all the things in this house. I could then reëstablish your daughter wherever she chose, in our house or elsewhere, and I should make myself responsible for her expenses——

SABINE. You promise her alms, that's what it amounts to. But from a grandmother, that is not enough when our child is threatened with mortal despair.

MME. FONTENAIS. Am I defending myself against your reproofs? What do my personal needs amount to? A black dress and a tiny room. On what do I spend the twenty thousand francs of income that I have left? In keeping a comfortable roof over your head and allowing you now and then a little luxury: in giving you an establishment with some sort of style, a month in the country during the summer, an occasional visit to the theatre during the winter, and a doctor whenever you as much as sneeze. Whatever balance I have at the end of the year I spend joyfully on New Year's gifts for you and Marie-Jeanne. What I am holding on to is what makes pleasant and cheerful here and there your own life which has had too little of pleasure and which I do not intend shall become any less cheerful or more sombre. Don't you understand that I am only trying to safeguard your future independence, your patrimony?

SABINE. I put my daughter before myself. Don't consider me.

MME. FONTENAIS. I am keeping afloat the raft

upon which, after your husband's shipwreck, you found a foothold, and upon which Marie-Jeanne may now climb in her turn and even fish out *her* husband. That is my last word on the subject!

SABINE. Do not make me take such a verdict without appeal to those two unhappy creatures whose last hope is in you. Say, rather, that you will think it over for some hours or even a couple of days!

MME. FONTENAIS. That would be only deceiving them. I have thought it over.

SABINE. Then let me say that you will give at least a part of the sum. Promise them two hundred thousand francs and that will make it easy to procure the rest—— Mamma, I implore you, when it is only two hundred thousand francs, promise them!

MME. FONTENAIS. I will not throw a penny of our money into the maw of that voracious factory! I have grown to distrust every one of two hundred pairs of hands that are working there, and every single chimney belching forth smoke and flame. It would only be feeding a monster that is always hungry and which would end by devouring everything we have!

SABINE. Ah! If only my dear father were here, he would be more pitiful! You yourself have just

recalled how kind and how generous he always was in such a case! He would have given his very blood.

MME. FONTENAIS. Your father's supreme wish was that his daughter and her daughter should be taken care of after he was gone. When he was on his deathbed, I can see him now, he took both my hands and said: "Sabine is a widow. She is very young and she will probably marry again. In any case, our granddaughter will marry. I want, before I go, to close the chapter of wasteful sons-in-law. Promise me that, whatever happens, you will never let any one get around you. Promise me that you will never put your signature to any paper nor give away any of the fortune that remains and which I have made secure to both of you with so much conjugal and paternal affection." My daughter, I have no religion dearer than the memory of your father, and I swore to do as he wished. I have no further explanation to make. [*She starts to go.*]

SABINE. But listen to me!

MME. FONTENAIS. No, the discussion is closed.

SABINE. I implore you, hear what I have to say!

MME. FONTENAIS. I have already heard quite enough.

SABINE. You cannot go in such a heartless way!

MME. FONTENAIS. This struggle has made me quite ill.

SABINE. And me also.

MME. FONTENAIS. I must get some air.

SABINE [*barring her way*]. In a moment.

MME. FONTENAIS. Let me go into the garden, I cannot breathe here.

SABINE [*sharply*]. You can breathe as much as ever you please, Mamma, when my daughter is over her difficulties.

MME. FONTENAIS. Sabine! You dare to speak to me in such a way!

SABINE. Forgive me, Mother, I was disrespectful, I admit it! But this is our first real disagreement. I no longer recognize you and I no longer recognize myself! [*Exit* MME. FONTENAIS *into the garden.*

Enter MARIE-JEANNE *and* MARAVON *by the door from the house.*

MARIE-JEANNE. Oh! Mother!

SABINE [*taking her in her arms*]. My little one! My dear child!

MARIE-JEANNE. Oh! it is not I, Mother, dear, it's Didier we must think of! What a terrible time he has been having in secret! How brave he has been

and how tender! Where is he? I suppose that terrible business is claiming him, and I want to throw my arms around his neck! However, since we all know the truth now, he can have that much off his mind. Have you been comforting him?

SABINE. I had not talked with your grandmother when he left.

MARIE-JEANNE. Everything is arranged?

SABINE. No! Mamma clings to a promise which it appears my father had the forethought to wring from her when on his deathbed. She will advance no money; in fact, she made the most formal and definite refusal.

MARAVON. The devil!

MARIE-JEANNE. But, Mother, when a brave, good man like Didier comes to his family for assistance, whatever it is he wants, they should give it to him if they have it!

SABINE. My arguments succeeded only in making your grandmother leave the room. She's out there now enthroned on her obstinacy, but I don't advise you to talk to her; it would be useless.

MARAVON. This is a catastrophe indeed.

MARIE-JEANNE. Mother, you will prevent it, won't you? You won't desert Didier! What are

you going to do? Think of something, can't you?

SABINE [*to* MARAVON]. Wait! Although I have no fortune at present, there is always what I shall have at mamma's death. I've just thought of that!

MARIE-JEANNE. Why! Yes! You can borrow on that.

MARAVON. You could get money that way only at the usurers and in a ridiculously small quantity. They might object that Mme. Fontenais might alter her will which would make it difficult for your creditors, or, above all, that if you were to die before your mother, you would not inherit at all, and in that case there would be no one to pay your debt.

MARIE-JEANNE. But I can guarantee my mother's signature. They certainly cannot pretend that grandmother will outlive both of us.

MARAVON. Your inheritance will come to you under the dowry law. What you would owe, if the loan were made, the law itself would prevent you paying, so your signature would be valueless.

MARIE-JEANNE. Heavens! Is there no way then that I can buy back the peace of that tortured soul who is suffering for me?

MARAVON. I will go and tell my son all that has taken place since he was here.

MARIE-JEANNE. Tell him that I didn't come with you because I didn't want to worry him before strangers. Tell him that I love him from the bottom of my heart! Oh! even more than that! And tell him I am waiting for him. [*Exit* MARAVON.

SABINE. If I had not, in talking to your grandmother, run up against one of those stone walls that people's consciences build for them when they don't want to do a thing, if she had been willing to part with a portion of the money needed, the matter might still have been arranged. I should have done even the most distasteful things: I should have gone to our friends, and I am sure that from one and another I could have gathered a considerable amount. But I cannot go to any one and say, "How much will you give me? My own mother will not give me anything!"

MARIE-JEANNE. We have not the choice of ways and means. We must do even that.

SABINE. One would have to have a kind of friends that seldom exists and which we certainly have not got.

MARIE-JEANNE. You have one friend, Mother, who is very rich and who loves you very dearly.

SABINE. I?

MARIE-JEANNE. A friend who wanted to marry you.

SABINE. Oh! Marie-Jeanne! In a moment when I am already sick with anxiety don't awaken that memory, of all others! That friend you speak of is no longer my friend. I do not know where he is nor what has become of him!

MARIE-JEANNE. How is it possible that after being friends from childhood you have not kept up some sort of correspondence, if only as a matter of courtesy?

SABINE. I did write to him just before you were married, to tell him about it. I hoped for some sort of answer, I don't know exactly what. I ought not to have written because he had told me he would never hear from me nor of me again. He kept his word: my letter came back to me unopened.

MARIE-JEANNE. He took that attitude at first out of pique. He must have grown more reasonable by this time. I believe I can remember the name of his place in America: wasn't it "White Hill?"

SABINE. Yes.

MARIE-JEANNE. It was near New Orleans, wasn't it, in the State of Louisiana?

SABINE. Yes. But what difference does that make?

MARIE-JEANNE [*going to the bookcase*]. Didier has a directory of foreign addresses somewhere. I'll see if the address we want is in it. It is this year's edition.

SABINE. I beg of you not to look! Let the book alone! Do not try to reopen a past that I have done everything in my power to forget!

MARIE-JEANNE. Here! I've found it! "White Hill. Salt and silver mines, cotton and sugar plantations. Owner, Stangy." Then, in parentheses, the initials G. N.

SABINE. George Norbert!

MARIE-JEANNE. So, he is found again! It must be he, come, look for yourself.

SABINE [*going over to her*]. It is as though I were spelling out on a tomb a name that made my heart leap at the sight.

MARIE-JEANNE. Monsieur Stangy is certainly alive! You can see from what is here he must be a man of considerable wealth, with all the opportunities they have out there in the New World. Besides, since he wanted to marry you, nothing is more probable than that he would accept your guarantee and

be more than willing to do you a service. From every point of view he seems to be a providential being sent to help us. Write him a long letter and tell him all about it. There is time enough for him to get it and send an answer. Here, Mother, dear, here is pen, ink, and paper. Write to Monsieur Stangy at once!

SABINE. Bring myself to his notice again with a demand for money! To reappear after all these years, asking a favor, importuning him for francs! Oh! No! Can't you see? I have felt that in spite of everything there was a link between us, forged of his esteem and of my pride. Do not ask me to destroy that, to degrade myself in the opinion he has held of me! I have not the courage!

MARIE-JEANNE. And where shall I find courage at all if my grandmother says, "I will not give the money even though I've got it," and my own mother adds, "I will not write the letter even though I can write it." What is there left that I can do for my husband?

SABINE. I express myself badly. It is not that I am obeying the counsel of false pride nor even of simple dignity. I feel myself held back by something deeper than that, something I must obey. It

is a certain modesty I feel with regard to that man, a feeling of modesty that, since he loved me, if I asked him for money I should be extorting it because of his affection, and the whole thing would smack of bought love. Can't you understand? Tell me that you see what I mean. You are a woman, too!

MARIE-JEANNE. Yes, I am a woman and the wife of Didier. The one thought in my mind is my husband. My eyes see nothing but the means to stop him from beating his head against a stone wall. I insist, Mother, that you write to Monsieur Stangy.

SABINE. You bring me to the point of asking my conscience whether the resistance I am making is unnatural. But no! My mind goes back to the moment when, forced to make a decision before this man, I unhesitatingly put you before my own feelings. I cannot defy my instinct to-day. If I hesitate, it is before an indelicacy, an impropriety.

MARIE-JEANNE. It seems delicate and proper to you to see your daughter and her husband overwhelmed with debt and involved in every sort of unpleasantness! Really, when I look at the situation in which we are all of us now entangled, I am sorry you did not accept Monsieur Stangy's irreproachable offer of marriage when he made it.

Then, instead of a mere stranger to whom you shrink from having recourse, he would be my step-father, here on the spot with his fortune ready to save my home.

SABINE. You accuse me of having done you a wrong?

MARIE-JEANNE. Oh! I don't accuse you of anything. If you made a mistake, I know you did it out of your excess of affection for me. But I cannot lose sight of the fact that our discussion has not brought us anywhere, that I shall have to go to my Didier with hands empty instead of being able to say, "Look! I have this much already!" Then, too, when I think of the exaggerated sacrifice you thought good to make for me before, I cannot help seeing that it has struck back now on my destiny.

SABINE. Say no more, Marie-Jeanne! If that is the way you feel about it, very well. I will do what I can to retrieve the wrong you think I have done you.

MARIE-JEANNE. Ah! Mother, dear, I cannot regret what I have said, since it makes me thank you yet once more! We do not know what chance you have of succeeding, but among the vows I have made there is one which will repay you for everything.

SABINE. I am doing it, my child, without any hope of ever being repaid.

MARIE-JEANNE. But let me tell you the little idea that came into my head, inspired by your agitation and the sound of your dear voice just now. This friend who was dearer, I do not doubt, than I have any idea of, and whom you renounced from mother love, your daughter will bring back to you in making you write that letter.

SABINE. Do you imagine that Stangy will come back? Where did you get such an idea? What madness! I feel sure that he no longer bears me any ill will and that he will do all he can for us when he learns of our difficulties, but that is all! His life work is established by this time. We do not know what things have entered into his life in four years—— He come back! Ah! if the impossible did happen and he did come, I would not see him for the world!

MARIE-JEANNE [*handing her a mirror*]. Why not? You have not changed in the least since he was here. You are as lovely and as charming and——

SABINE [*putting down the mirror without looking at herself*]. Don't try to deceive your old mother, my child. You cannot make me believe that I have not altered. Don't say any more about it. Let me

write a plain, short letter so that he will think I no longer remember. "My dear Friend." No, that won't do. [*Tears up the sheet of paper.*] "My dear Stangy." [*She appears to be thinking what to say, then she reaches out for the mirror and having looked at herself timidly, she adds.*] You really think I haven't changed much?

Curtain

ACT III

ACT III

The scene is the same as Act I. The curtain rises discovering the parlor maid hunting for something among the furniture.

MAID. How should I know where the old thing has left her embroidery!

Enter MARAVON.

MARAVON. Will you see that Monsieur Didier knows that I am here?

MAID. Yes, sir. [*Exit maid.*

[*Enter* MME. FONTENAIS. *She does not see* MARAVON *at first.*]

MME. FONTENAIS. Well, Jenny, haven't you found it? [*Sees* MARAVON.] You here at ten o'clock in the morning? I hope you, too, haven't been sent to make me a scene!

MARAVON. No, my dear friend. It is not you I have come to see, but my son who no longer has any home except yours since he went into bankruptcy with your consent.

MME. FONTENAIS. Reproaches from you, too? Have I even mentioned the mix-up your son has made in my family? Have I addressed a single word of blame to him? I said to him, "You and your wife may come into my home and it shall be yours as well." Now they are very decidedly in their own home, but I am no longer in mine. Yesterday evening I had to flee from this very room, before the assault which my daughter, my granddaughter, and her husband made upon me! They no longer try to frighten me with the prospect of the failure, since that has come and the earth has not opened and swallowed us up. No, thank God, we are all alive. But they attack me now with another consideration, that of obtaining your son's certificate of bankruptcy, for which I am expected to fall in line with the small sum of one hundred thousand francs.

MARAVON. Mme. Fontenais, if Didier's failure did not bring death among us, it was thanks to Marie-Jeanne, thanks to Mme. Revel, and thanks to me. There were days together when if we had left my unhappy son alone for a moment he would have taken one leap from his doorway into the Seine. Since we were three against one, we were able to make him resign himself to his real duty, which is his

rehabilitation in the business world. But in order to do that, he must first get out of the state of bankruptcy in which he can do nothing, neither buy nor sell, start any project nor pay off any obligation. The meeting of his creditors, before whom he is to appear now, at twelve o'clock, will determine definitely his fate accordingly as he has or has not a hundred thousand francs to continue the business with. Do not bear a grudge against Didier because he has in this supreme trial come to you for the means of reëstablishing himself in the eyes of the world as a citizen and a man free and equal with other men.

MME. FONTENAIS. Let your son say this to the men with whom he is involved: "Divide among you all I have, but do not ask me for what I have not." Let him tell them: "Stop, above all things, trying to blackmail the grandmother. She is a ferocious creature with no compassion—on my creditors; she is an absurd and ridiculous person who has seen money in the hands of her son-in-law fade like snow before the sun! She is an old beast——"

MARAVON. Madame Fontenais!

MME. FONTENAIS. Yes, let him tell them that I am an old beast, but that I have my own way of

looking at things, and that I still fancy myself bound by a promise I made my husband on his death-bed!

MARAVON. But let me——

MME. FONTENAIS. No, Maravon. I argued this question until one o'clock last night with your son and my two furies, and the only reason I am here now is to look for my work which I left upon the field of battle. You came to see your son, and as I hear him coming, I'll leave you.

[*Exit* MME. FONTENAIS.

Enter DIDIER.

MARAVON. Good morning, my dear boy!

DIDIER. Pardon me for keeping you waiting. I no longer know what I am doing! My mind is filled with Marie-Jeanne, whose condition has been worrying me to death for some hours.

MARAVON. What do you mean? I've just been talking to Mme. Fontenais and she said nothing about it.

DIDIER. She probably doesn't know about it. This house is divided into two camps which no longer communicate with each other. Since Marie-Jeanne has known about my troubles she has been

far from well, and for the last fortnight I have been very uneasy about the way she suddenly changes color. She jumps at the slightest sound, and last night, after a very stormy discussion, when her grandmother left the room, banging the door behind her, Marie-Jeanne, who was greatly upset by the quarrel, fainted dead away in my arms.

MARAVON. Gracious!

DIDIER. I carried her to her bed and she remained unconscious for at least a quarter of an hour. It was so late that the servant had gone, so I had to leave my wife in her mother's care and go myself in search of the doctor.

MARAVON. What did he have to say?

DIDIER. Mme. Revel and I did our best to make him say that it was nothing, but he wouldn't say so. He promised to tell us this morning. All we could get out of him was that she was a blade that was wearing its sheath, and then he asked us all sorts of things, as though Marie-Jeanne's reason were in question. He said that the expression of her eyes was that of a person suffering from a fixed idea, and that the first thing to do would be to get rid of that idea. My mother-in-law and I listened in consternation, aghast. We did not know what to do. We could

not expect a miracle, and yet the miracle has taken place.

MARAVON. What do you mean?

DIDIER. We kept watch together over Marie-Jeanne until dawn and then her mother went to her room to get a little rest. About half-past eight, just as one of my men was coming for orders, Mme. Revel came back very suddenly into her daughter's room. She was very obviously upset, and throwing her arms around my wife's neck, she cried, "It's all right! Don't worry any longer, Didier is going to have the money for the certificate of bankruptcy!" This legal term, made for the lips of judges and the ears of assignees, my poor wife has been saying and hearing said for days, like a love term. Hearing her mother's words, she became transfigured and seemed to breathe in new life. I wanted to know more, but my mother-in-law met our questions with a mysterious silence, only she did not deny it when Marie-Jeanne cried out joyously: "You've had an answer from Monsieur Stangy! You see what a good idea it was! Oh! how glad I am!" Mme. Revel would not make any explanation, but she freed herself from her daughter's embrace with the magic phrase: "Now let me go and get our hundred thousand

francs." She has been gone nearly two hours now and you can imagine with what impatience we are awaiting her return.

MAID [*coming to the door*]. The doctor has come.

DIDIER. Take him to my wife's room. [*Exit maid.*] You will excuse me?

MARAVON. Certainly. I'll wait and hear what he has to say. [*Exit* DIDIER.

[*Enter* SABINE. *She wears a street dress and seems bewildered.*]

MARAVON. Ah, my dear friend, tell me right away that what Didier says is true!

SABINE. What? What did he tell you?

MARAVON. That you have straightened matters out at last. I gathered from what he said that you have received, two months late, a reply from America.

SABINE. Stangy has not answered my letter.

MARAVON. Well, then, what has happened? Who has come forward?

SABINE. Everything is as it was. Nothing is changed.

MARAVON. But what does it all mean? Why do you look so upset? Where are you coming from in such a state?

SABINE. Don't take advantage of the condition

you find me in. Don't ask me any questions, let me be quiet for a moment and pull myself together! [*She throws herself into a chair and then jumps up again suddenly.*] No! Ask me as many questions as you like! Come, let us talk. Since you have seen Didier, you know about my mother's latest refusal?

MARAVON. Yes, I know.

SABINE. Well, there is something about it that I am not sorry to have to tell you, at least. During the terrible quarrel that took place here some hours ago, when we were like a family of Atrides, I heard ringing in my ears a conversation that you and I had once had in this very room. You held then that the principles of nature imposed upon parents, whether they would or no, the duty of despoiling themselves for their children. And while I was thinking over your words, I saw my daughter with her hands clasped in supplication, and my mother with her brows knitted, biting her lip and crying No! No! and always No! [*Laughs bitterly.*] Then I saw how far your theories were from realities!

MARAVON. I don't defend Mme. Fontenais, neither do I attack her. I only remind you that she is no longer young and that, at her age, a woman's

maternal instincts are atrophied. In old people there is always a sort of progressive silencing of the voices of nature. Do not condemn Mme. Fontenais; try rather to understand her!

SABINE. Is your philosophy as imperturbable as all that? You explain tranquilly how a grandmother can give her own grandchild only the alms and shelter which one would give to a stranger of the road whom one has never seen before and will never see again!

MARAVON. Old people, I repeat, are always like that. These heads upon which the snows have fallen have centres of economy from which money comes but sparingly, just as from some glaciers the water flows only in tiny streams. You cannot change the fundamental order of things.

SABINE. Then why should beings, who no longer possess their share of human affections, be allowed to claim all human rights? Is it fair and just that the senile inhumanity of my mother will not allow me to dispossess her, to take her place in the administration of money which I should put to such a good use? Is it not monstrous that the flight of these young souls should be held in check by a will that is nearly at its close, and that their future should be

tortured by these hands that are already growing cold? Say that you think it intolerable! Say that against that one might do anything! Say it! Say it!

MARAVON. My poor friend, you accused me of being a false prophet that day when I told you that filial piety seldom stood a severe test. And now, when destiny is proving you, your civilized soul sinks to the level of the redskins. I hear you talking of the old hands of your mother with the same spirit with which they make an old chief climb a tree and then shake it to see if he can still hold on.

SABINE. No! Do not even suggest that I have been thinking of the death of my mother! That would be a misfortune I could not endure! Such an idea has never even crossed my mind.

MARAVON. If you have not been thinking of that, of what have you been thinking?

SABINE. I beg your pardon. Your tone is singular. Why do you look at me like that? It is not worth while to ask me what I have done, if you already know!

MARAVON. I do not know, I only——

SABINE. You only read my thoughts! Well, you have just called me a savage; what do savages do

when necessity demands and the means are at their disposal? I believed my daughter to be about to draw her last breath. I had helped carry her poor body which has fallen away to less than half its weight, I had seen her tossing on her pillows in the last stage of weakness—— Then, when there was only one remedy that the doctor could prescribe and when I could get that remedy nowhere in the world except in my mother's strong box——

MARAVON. You——

SABINE. Yes!

MARAVON. Oh!

SABINE. You, whose heart has beaten for so long now in unison with mine for our children, believe me when I tell you that if I am only now pouring forth what has been stifling me, it is not because I was ashamed of what I had done, but because I had failed in doing it!

MARAVON. What have you done? What is it?

SABINE. I will tell you. I will tell you everything. Listen! I hadn't thought of it, I hadn't dreamed of it before last night! Suddenly the idea came to me while I was watching at Marie-Jeanne's bedside. It was four o'clock in the morning. Instantly I made up my mind. I got up from the chair

where I had been sitting all night. I came through this room and went in there. Mamma gave a cry, but it was nothing, she was dreaming. I went on tiptoe over to the window—I drew the curtain aside the least bit so as to let a crack of light from the dawn come in—and then to work! If mamma had waked up, if she caught me or called out, I should have cried: "Hush, it is I—— Yes, I who will not see my daughter go mad nor die!" I took the key basket from the dressing-table. I opened the wardrobe. I came and went as noiselessly as a cat, between the ray of light and the strong box, until I had made my choice. And all the time mamma was talking in a raucous voice in her nightmare. Once she called out "Ah! Ah!" so loudly that I thought I had awakened her, but no, she slept on—— Do I horrify you?

MARAVON. I cannot say just now what I feel. I am not judging you, I am only listening. Go on.

SABINE. When I got back to my room I had three certificates worth fifty thousand francs each. That was even more than I needed, but how was I to transform this paper into money? I already knew how to go about that because I had often been with my mother to her broker's. I knew the open sesame:

endorse the certificates, ask for the money, date the receipt and sign it. For several hours I made rough copies of the signature—— When I had made the forgery three times on the stamped paper, I saw how perfectly I had done it. It remained then to go to the broker's, to put on a bold front and take him in. He had known me for years. He was a friend of my father's. You have often dined with him at our house. I knew I should be received with confidence and that he would do everything for me. And indeed, he did—— When I got there, I told him my mother was very sick, which would not surprise any one who comes often to our house; I told him we were anxious to hurry through the liquidation of my son-in-law's affairs, and of course he knew all about that. As I had brought the securities, I begged him to realize on them immediately for me as they do for old clients and friends of the firm.

MARAVON. Then it was no longer your mother you were robbing, but the trustee who was responsible for the estate.

SABINE. Ah! I did not stop to think of that. Anyhow, in view of what I had already done, mamma would only have had to pay up, as I don't suppose she would let me go to jail—— You interrupted

me—— Where was I? Oh! Yes! The broker had taken me very cordially into his private office. He ascertained that they had enough money on hand to pay over the hundred thousand francs that I needed. While he was examining the certificates, an employee of the bank brought the sheaves of notes and the receipt all ready. Then the broker and I were left alone together chatting. He started to count the notes slowly and I listened, counting them over to myself one by one and seeing them piled up there, the ransom for my daughter's health and life. In an instant I would take them away; before this evening they would be distributed by your son, they would disappear. And when the day came for explanations I should be ready to explain and to answer for what I had done. The accursed certificates on the corner of the table held my eye in spite of myself. If only he did not scrutinize them another time! But even if he had been seized with an unexpected suspicion, the way my mother signed her name was graven on my memory and I could see how exactly I had shaped each letter and the little flourish underneath. "The sum is all right," he said, and handed me the money in exchange for the receipt which I had just signed. I stood up, I hid

my prey in the bosom of my dress, and was opening the door when an exclamation from the broker rooted me to the spot. "If you please, my dear Madame, you have made a mistake; you have signed your mother's name to the receipt!" Yes, I had done it! I had so carefully imitated my mother's handwriting by continual practice that some devil had made my fingers shape her signature instead of my own, and I, Sabine Revel, had just signed "Veuve Fontenais." Already my inquisitor was comparing the signature he had seen me make with those I had brought ready made. His face changed expression and I knew I was caught! I threw myself on my knees and implored him not to make me give back the money! Alas! What terrible moments! But the most terrible was not when I had to confess, but when I had to give up the money. My tears called forth in this old friend of our family only the sort of compassion which made the least difference to me. He granted me the time which I thought would be sufficient to make a clean breast of it all to my mother and took it upon himself to bring back the certificates after I had told her—— I came away blind with humiliation, sick with the sense of failure as you saw me come in just now. And that is all!

MARAVON. Yes, that is all! You don't expect me to approve of your deed; and yet to reprove it, the language of ordinary morality seems paltry. The revolution in your conscience is certainly criminal, and when a thing of that kind happens, good and evil get somewhat upset from their everyday places. I am only taking the practical point of view. Why didn't you go on your adventure without saying anything to your daughter? Why did you jingle in her ears money that you did not have and which you ended by not getting?

SABINE. Ask that question of some one who is cool and collected! Can't you understand that, even as it was, from the moment I left these friendly walls, by which, criminal though I was, I felt protected, I was at the point of fainting away? I sought the cordial which would make firm my will, my voice, my every movement. I knew I should succeed if I did not tremble, if I did not stammer. To raise my courage to white heat, I stirred up, I relit that of Marie-Jeanne. In galvanizing her, in catching from her eye a spark of faith and joy, I acquired a courage, an audacity which could not give way.

MARAVON. And now, having raised vain hopes in

her at a time when every atom of her strength has to be carefully husbanded, you must cast them down again!

SABINE. Ah! You see I am putting off as long as ever I can the terrible moment of going to her. I must keep her in ignorance as long as possible, and your son, too. In his uprightness as well as his sadness he might cry out against me if I let him know. My falsehoods will protect him without harming him. Don't betray me to him!

MARAVON. Your secret is as safe with me as with a confessor.

SABINE. Oh! Yes! I am going to lie, to lie to the very last word, but not before you, because you would know that everything I said was false. Don't come into Marie-Jeanne's room with me—— And if she should feel better, she might come in here at any minute, so won't you please go, right away?

MARAVON. May I not wait to hear what the doctor has to say?

SABINE. What! Is he there? I came in with my key and I haven't seen anybody but you, and you didn't tell me!

MARAVON. I've had enough to make me forget everything!

[*Enter* DIDIER *and the doctor.* DIDIER *speaks in the doorway.*]

DIDIER. Ah! my mother-in-law has come back.

SABINE. Tell me quickly, Doctor, how is she?

DOCTOR. I am at your disposal, Madame. [*To* DIDIER.] You would only hear me repeat what I've already told you. Go back to your wife so she will not think we are having an endless family council about her health. In the condition she is in, that would do her no good.

DIDIER. Of course I will. [*To* SABINE.] May I tell her that everything is all right?

SABINE. Oh! Yes, certainly—— I'll be in there in a few moments myself. [*Exit* DIDIER.

SABINE [*to the doctor.*] Well?

DOCTOR. Well, we have to deal with a sort of exhaustion of the nervous system such as follows any serious nervous shock or mental strain. The fainting spells and vertigo of which she complains and the way her face grows thinner and her cheeks redder at the same time, are all the premonitory symptoms of tuberculosis.

SABINE. Oh! My God!

DOCTOR. Your daughter has youth on her side and her constitution still has many resources, so we

are going to try to pull her together. Where can I write my prescription?

SABINE. Sit down there. Think well and assemble all the forces of science!

DOCTOR [*sitting at a table*]. I have very little medicine to prescribe. What I consider would be efficacious, necessary, is a prolonged change of air, one of those outdoor cures in a very dry, bracing atmosphere: Maloja in the Engadine, for instance. It is now the middle of June. Until the end of August, until snow begins to fall there, the patient would have before her two months and a half of atmospheric tonic, that is, if no time is lost in getting her there.

SABINE. It will take some time to make preparations.

DOCTOR. Cut them short. Get your daughter away as soon as possible.

SABINE. Very well, she shall start to-morrow.

MARAVON. Keep up your courage, dear friend. I will go now as you asked me to, but I will come back later.

SABINE [*going with him to the door*]. Yes, please do.

DOCTOR [*sitting still at table, writing*]. By the way, how is Mme. Fontenais doing?

SABINE. She is fairly well. [*To* MARAVON.]

You will save me an interview for which you know I am not prepared if as you go out you will stop in my mother's room and tell her about this sudden departure and the reasons for it.

MARAVON. I am at your service. Do you expect to go with the children?

SABINE. I have no idea of being separated from my daughter. [*Exit* MARAVON.

DOCTOR. Here are instructions for all that can be done. But there is no use of my going over them now. In this kind of hypochondria, in an illness where the cause is obviously mental, the treatment must as far as possible be mental, too. Do all you can to keep your daughter content: cajoleries, amusements, anything she may want——

SABINE. Even to pulling down the moon for her! Come, tell me the truth, is her condition serious?

DOCTOR [*reassuringly*]. Oh, no! But I should, however, be failing in my duty if I were to lull your fears completely to sleep.

SABINE. Lull them to sleep? They will never cease to be awake! I am not a doctor, but I am a mother. When it is one's own child it seems as though it were already lost. And when a woman is a mother, that seems impossible, for she cannot put

into a coffin what she has put into the world, and if one or the other has to die it should be her own self since she is the mother.

DOCTOR. Be calm! We shall succeed, I hope, in repairing the damage already done. But one thing I want to caution you about: if Mme. Fontenais shows the least disposition to go along, refuse absolutely to take her.

SABINE. Mamma? Why?

DOCTOR. I have recently examined her again and her heart is not in sufficiently good condition for an altitude of eighteen hundred metres. Up there the heart works four times as hard as it ordinarily does, to supply its owner with the necessary oxygen, and this is dangerous when the arteries are no longer supple. I don't mean to alarm you about Mme. Fontenais. In the low altitude of Paris she may live indefinitely, but to expose her to the increased respiration of a high altitude would be like giving her a stab with a knife.

SABINE. It is important to know that.

DOCTOR. One word more: heart patients are very impressionable. If Mme. Fontenais asks for reasons, don't give her the real one.

SABINE. I understand.

DOCTOR. Good-bye, then. Let us hope that by September everything will be going so well that you won't even remember me. [*Exit doctor.*

MME. FONTENAIS *comes from her room.*

SABINE. You!

MME. FONTENAIS. Yes, I! Is there anything peculiar in my being in my own drawing-room? Did you think I had been thrown out into the street? But I've come, my daughter, to ask you to forget the angry words that passed between us. I am deeply grieved that Marie-Jeanne should have been made so ill just because her young head cannot rule my old one. I cannot feel, however, that I am responsible for her hysteria just because I did not care to bear all the results of her Didier's mistakes. However, we won't go over all that again. What I came to tell you was that of course you may count upon me for everything, the expenses of the journey and while you are there.

SABINE. Thanks.

MME. FONTENAIS. Sabine! Why do you speak to me like that? Are you still angry? You sound as though you were trying to insult me!

SABINE. I am not able to do that.

MME. FONTENAIS. You know that no one loves you as I do!

SABINE. Ah! if I did not have the affection of Marie-Jeanne to sustain me, I should feel as though I were not loved or wanted by any one!

MME. FONTENAIS. Take my word, my child, for I now see everything clearly. I have only you, you have only your daughter, and your daughter has only her husband. What she loves most dearly in you is that you make a common cause with her against me for the man she loves. Beware the day when you are no longer at one with her wifely affection! Then you will know what it is to be only a mother! But I oughtn't to go on dragging up disagreeable things. Let us talk about practical matters. Do you think the big trunk will be large enough for us both?

SABINE. There isn't any question of your going, Mamma. I couldn't let you take such a long and unnecessary journey and upset all your habits for so many weeks.

MME. FONTENAIS. Nothing could ever upset my habits except being separated from you.

SABINE. It would be foolish for you to spend days on a railroad train at your age and in your state of

health, not to mention the fatigues of travelling in the Alps and camping here and there in chance hotels.

MME. FONTENAIS. If I am no longer young and if, as I believe, my end is not far off, that is all the more reason why you should not leave me for three months in the care of a chambermaid. Since I am not to be with you for long, I shall stay with you while I can. You shall not go without me.

SABINE. You oblige me to tell you, Mother, that I don't want you.

MME. FONTENAIS. Ah, bah!

SABINE. Now, listen. I shall have my hands full with Marie-Jeanne, and I must give every moment of my time and every thought to getting her well, and there must not be anything to take my mind off her. And then, if the climate doesn't suit the child, if we should have to bring her back quickly or go from place to place looking for another resort that does suit, I couldn't make you go and come as we might have to do, nor even secure you the accommodations and comforts that you are accustomed to.

MME. FONTENAIS. In other words, I should just be a burden!

SABINE. You have no right to say that! What I meant was simply that I could not look after your comfort as well as I should like to do.

MME. FONTENAIS. And to do that, I am to be banished from your presence, to be left behind like a naughty child. You've arranged that yourself, your daughter, and your son-in-law shall be away together, out of reach of the old woman who is sworn at when she won't pay up and with whom you won't burden yourselves when she does! Very well! The consideration that I am not to have shown me I must manage to secure for myself, and as I hold the purse-strings, I shall see that I am not left alone. Your daughter has her husband to go with her, and he will have nothing on earth to do except to amuse her and see that she gets well. If you choose, she may have a nurse into the bargain. There is nothing unusual in sending off a young woman of twenty years on a journey with such a retinue, even if she is suffering from nervous exhaustion. But if you go, I go, and if I stay, you stay with me!

SABINE. You are cruel to take advantage of my poverty!

Enter DIDIER *carrying cushions, etc.*

DIDIER. They want to do up Marie-Jeanne's room, so I thought I'd fix a place for her here.

SABINE. Has she got up already? Is she coming in here?

DIDIER. In a minute.

MME. FONTENAIS. You can talk it over with the others and decide whether you prefer to take me with you or remain behind yourself.

SABINE. Mamma, I beg of you!

MME. FONTENAIS. I shall give my assistance only in one case or the other.

SABINE [*to herself*]. Then I shall have to stay behind! [*Exit* MME. FONTENAIS.

[*Enter* MARIE-JEANNE. DIDIER *goes to meet her.*]

DIDIER. Wait for me, dear! You are not strong enough!

MARIE-JEANNE [*to* SABINE]. Mother, you have the hundred thousand francs for Didier?

SABINE. Sit down there. Lie back.

MARIE-JEANNE. You have the hundred thousand francs?

SABINE. I told you that the money had been promised me——

MARIE-JEANNE. By Monsieur Stangy?

SABINE. Of course—— But it hasn't come yet.

MARIE-JEANNE [*with a gesture of despair*]. Oh!

SABINE. That doesn't mean that it won't come! Only that it will take time——

MARIE-JEANNE. But our creditors are going to meet to-day, right away. How will they treat this poor boy if he has nothing to give them?

DIDIER. If I can assure them that the settlement will be made very soon, it may be sufficient to induce them to sign my act of deliverance to-day. It won't make any difference to them since the contract will become null and void if I don't carry out my part of it on the day agreed upon.

SABINE [*to* MARIE-JEANNE]. You hear what he says? Your husband doesn't lose his head the way you do. He knows better how to manage his own affairs than you and I.

DIDIER. I must ask you, though, to give me some exact information about the money.

SABINE. Of course—— Certainly——

MARIE-JEANNE. Is the letter you had from Monsieur Stangy too personal for you to hand it over to Didier?

SABINE. I had only a cable—which I left at the

bank where I was directed to go. Don't stare at me like that: it is a well-known bank, it is—the Crédit Lyonnais. [*To* DIDIER.] You know what a long time I was out this morning? [*To* MARIE-JEANNE.] See, my gloves and hat are still there! When you were so sick and when we expected the doctor every minute, do you suppose I would have left you except for something important like that? When I went out, I swear to you I was sure I should come back with the money I promised you. The cable only said that an account had been opened in my name, but by accident the bank had not received their notification. Of course every one knew Stangy's name. They told me that every bit of his European business passes through their hands, but that often telegrams of that kind from him were delayed. I left my address, and they are to let me know when everything is all right. Now, I've nothing more to tell you. Are you satisfied?

DIDIER. Oh, I am more than satisfied. Did you imagine I could doubt your word?

SABINE [*to* DIDIER]. Then you may go away with your mind at rest. I will keep you posted as to events at this end and I shall look anxiously every day for news of your recovery.

MARIE-JEANNE. What! You are not coming with me?

SABINE. I have to stay with your grandmother.

MARIE-JEANNE. Oh! don't do that! I must have you with me! You know I am always your little baby daughter again whenever I have even a tiny hurt!

SABINE. Don't you suppose that if I were able there is nothing I would rather do than go with you? But mamma insists upon my staying behind with her.

MARIE-JEANNE. Why not bring her along?

SABINE. Oh! No! That would be impossible!

MARIE-JEANNE. It's even more impossible for you to be separated from me! Feel my hands, Mother, dear. See how cold and damp they have grown just at the very idea of not having you with me?

SABINE. For heaven's sake, Marie-Jeanne, don't go on like this or you will drive me mad!

MARIE-JEANNE. Bring grandmother along and that will simplify everything.

SABINE. No! No! Do not insist! It cannot be done!

DIDIER [*to* SABINE]. It is nearly time for my appointment. When may I tell my creditors the money will be paid? Shall I say in a month?

SABINE. Oh! Not so soon as that! Give yourself more time. I don't want Marie-Jeanne to be worrying about business until she is quite well!

DIDIER. Very well. Then I'll ask for three months. And you yourself will see that I am all fixed up by then?

SABINE. Surely—— Certainly.

DIDIER. Because, if not, I should be treated as an absconder for having abused their leniency. They would ruin me without pity and perhaps prevent me from ever rehabilitating myself.

SABINE [*worried*]. Would they?

MARIE-JEANNE. Oh, now that I think of Didier as being at last out of the claws of those vultures, if he ever fell back again, I know I should die!

SABINE [*in anguish*]. Don't even speak of such a thing.

DIDIER. The promises I am about to make are of the last importance to me. If there is even the shadow of uncertainty in your mind, it would be better for me not to make them.

[SABINE *is silent.*]

MARIE-JEANNE [*sitting up, frightened*]. Mother! You don't answer!

SABINE. Of course! Don't fly up in the air like

that! It was only that Didier's tone disconcerted me for a moment——

MARIE-JEANNE [*falling back, faint*]. Ah!

SABINE [*distracted*]. Oh! My God! Don't faint again! Where—— Where are the salts! Open your eyes, my child! [*To* DIDIER.] Do you see how she goes off for nothing at all? She looks almost dead! My child, wake up! Everything in the world might die before I would let you die! Marie-Jeanne, do you hear me? Ah! She is coming to! Thank Heaven! Now listen, my child, to what I am saying to Didier. [*To him.*] You may go with your mind at rest and take any steps that will bring life and health back into this little body. I make myself responsible for whatever agreement you may sign. As far as it is in the power of any human being to keep their word, I pledge you on my eternal soul to keep mine! [*Exit* DIDIER.

MME. FONTENAIS [*coming out of her room*]. Well, where do you stand between your mother and your daughter? Am I to go or am I not?

SABINE [*answering with a nod of her head rather than with her voice*]. Yes.

Curtain

ACT IV

ACT IV

The scene represents a terrace in front of a small chalet at the summit of the Maloja. "The Palace" is seen at back, also the lake, the valley of the Inn, and the mountains. There are tables and chairs about, and a tent.

The curtain rises discovering a maid clearing away one of the tables. STANGY *enters.*

STANGY. Is this the chalet where Mme. Revel is stopping?

MAID. Yes, sir.

STANGY [*seeing* MME. FONTENAIS *enter, coming back from a walk*]. You do not recognize me, Madame?

MME. FONTENAIS. Monsieur Stangy!

[*The maid goes into the chalet.*]

STANGY. I have been staying at The Palace for some time. Yesterday evening at dusk, when your landau passed, I thought it was you and your family arriving, so, later in the evening, I made sure by

looking at the list of guests at the hotel of which this is a *dependence*. I was coming this morning to ask if I might call, providing my presence did not stir up unpleasant memories like a ghost of the past, when the morning post brought me a long and important letter from your daughter.

MME. FONTENAIS. From my daughter?

STANGY. The letter, which was written me many weeks ago, did not arrive at my home in the United States until after I left, and it has followed me around since then from place to place. In it I learned for the first time of the pecuniary difficulties that have occurred in your family.

MME. FONTENAIS. I was unaware that Sabine had written you on the subject. Those difficulties of which you speak have been the cause of a great deal of reticence between me and mine.

STANGY. Since I have learned that Mme. Revel has done me the honor to count upon my assistance, I am all haste to justify her trust in my friendship.

MME. FONTENAIS. In any case she will be overjoyed to see you after so long a time. You were always such a good friend of hers. She is suffering herself to a certain extent, I fear from the nervous trouble that is our reason for bringing Marie-Jeanne

here. I was watching her this morning, walking up and down, her eyes looking positively haggard. It was scarcely becoming to her or comfortable for me! Since I have been in this pure, fresh air, I seem to be living more intensely, I feel almost intoxicated by it. [*She shivers slightly.*] I'm afraid I took too long a walk by the lake. Will you excuse me? I must go in and lie down. I will send my daughter out to you.

[*She goes into the chalet.* SABINE *comes out by another door.*]

SABINE. You here? I wonder if I am really awake or if you are not just an apparition, a dream!

STANGY [*embarrassed*]. It is really I, but I feel just as you do. Since you have had ample time to accuse me of gross negligence of your call for help, please let me, first of all, exonerate myself.

SABINE. I heard your explanation.

STANGY. Then it only remains for me to say that I am entirely at your disposal.

SABINE. Ah! That is noble of you!

STANGY. Do not thank me! I don't even deserve your faith in asking me. I dispose of a great deal of money that I never see again, but in this case, know-

ing you as well as I do, I cannot even flatter myself that my loan will run the risk of not being repaid.

SABINE. Oh! But you are generosity itself! Please believe me, it was only my daughter's prayers, her tears, that induced me to write to you at all. We have almost become strangers, have we not?

STANGY. After having been such good friends?

SABINE. Ah! Yes, we were that, Stangy! Some mysterious bond still binds me to you, for in the despair which was killing Marie-Jeanne by inches, I did not hesitate to tell her and her husband that you had already replied favorably—— Do not undeceive them! You must have come to me in spirit over all those miles when I was in trouble, and I had the divination to know it, and God has made it all turn out right! Thanks to your affection for me, my daughter is saved! And that isn't all! You are here in time. Ah! You don't know what a difference that makes! No one could ever know!

STANGY. What has happened in all the time since you wrote me in such pressing terms?

SABINE. The crash came, but thanks to you now, the consequences will soon be averted. But will you talk to my son-in-law about the figures, the money? All that is so painful between you and me.

STANGY. Your son-in-law is altogether down and out?

SABINE. Alas! Yes! He has signed away all his interest in the factory.

STANGY. We'll have to put him on his feet again.

SABINE. I haven't told you what it will all come to, but how good you are to be willing to shield him from future worries as well!

STANGY. I am more than anxious to help you in every possible way.

SABINE. Ah! Stangy, I shall thank you till the end of my days! You are still my own Stangy!

STANGY. You wrote me that Monsieur Didier Maravon was a fine young fellow and a capable engineer who only needed a chance.

SABINE. Yes, and I sincerely believe it. If you could only help him along by your advice and your experience! You used to see him at our house. He dined there the night you went away.

STANGY. Well, all you have to do is to bring us together.

SABINE. I will do so without delay because I must get my mother away from here as quickly as possible. By to-morrow we shall be well on our journey.

STANGY. Is it the rigorous climate that is chasing you away so soon?

SABINE. Yes.

STANGY. These sudden high winds and changes of temperature with the thermometer at thirty degrees in the sun, and ten degrees in the shade, and below zero at night, I can imagine how they must alarm you when you are responsible for a person of Mme. Fontenais's age.

SABINE. My flight will take me away from you at a time and in circumstances when I should need an eternity to thank you. You already know what you were to me; you dragged an avowal from me! I tremble to tell you again——

STANGY [*in anguish*]. Sabine!

SABINE. Yes, I treated you badly, I admit it. I ruined a whole period of your life. And yet you rise up before me so splendidly as a saviour, that Heaven itself seems to have sent you to put an end to my trials. Was not this meeting brought about by Fate, so that I should at last have some happiness and perhaps give some in exchange? You will come back to Paris again and find your way to my home where I have never ceased to see your image?

STANGY. I came here—— I am kept here—by—the health of my wife.

SABINE [*thunderstruck*]. Your wife! Oh!

STANGY. Did you think I would remain in a solitude of eternal fidelity?

SABINE. Yes—— No—— Oh! I don't know!

STANGY. A year after we parted I married a cousin of mine in Louisiana, a good, simple, ignorant, primitive creature. I did not expect ever again to leave that country of refuge to which I had returned to employ all the powers of a man who, having lost his ideal, obeys an instinct of animal activity to labor, to struggle, to have a domain of his own, and to continue his race! But I have not altogether succeeded in becoming the brute I intended. In two years I had a child, and three months ago it died. Its little soul went out stifling, even as it held out its tiny arms to me, and I have always before me that gesture imploring me for help which I could not give. From the day it died my wife would not go near the house, and I felt the same way, so we have exiled ourselves. I had seen my mother die in the same place, and my father, and every time I went to the cemetery I lived over again the terrible hours of their deaths,

for I loved them as all good people love their parents, as you love your mother——

SABINE. Yes!

STANGY. How was it possible that I should have been so broken, so stricken down by the passing of that little being who still could hardly talk and with whom I could not yet have had any memories in common, any exchange of ideas or anything, indeed, save the feeling that he was my child? It is bad enough when those who have given us life are snatched away from us while we have scarcely time to turn our backs. But when, before our faces, it is our own children that are taken, our own handiwork, our own personal creation in which we see ourselves reborn, that is almost more than flesh can endure!

SABINE. My dear friend, I feel for you with all of my mother's heart, with all that I have of a woman's tenderness, with all that I have of love!

STANGY. Would not Destiny have been kinder to us if I had answered your letter from afar with another letter, and we two had been spared this interview in which I have had to be frank and tell you the truth?

SABINE. No! No! Do not regret for an instant our having met! For four years my saddest thought

has been that I should leave this world without seeing you again. Now I have seen you, which is more than I deserve in coming here at all. [DIDIER *appears in the door of the chalet.*] Here is my son-in-law. I will leave you together while I go and reserve our places on the train for to-morrow.

STANGY [*going to* DIDIER]. We are old acquaintances.

DIDIER. Ah! Monsieur! How many times in the last few days Marie-Jeanne and I have blessed you! I am so glad to be able to thank you personally.

STANGY. Oh! We won't speak of that. That is already ancient history. [*To* SABINE.] Isn't it?

SABINE [*clasping his hand*]. Thank you!

[*Exit toward the Palace.*

STANGY. Shall we talk a little about your plans?

DIDIER. Well, I can't say I have any real plans yet. I haven't had time to make any. [MARIE-JEANNE *comes out of the chalet with a shawl over her arm and a book in her hand.*] May my wife hear what we have to say?

STANGY. Why, of course!

MARIE-JEANNE [*excitedly*]. Monsieur Stangy! You are with us again! Oh! I wish I could tell you——

STANGY. Don't bother, my dear child, it's all right! Sit down there. I've learned to look after sick people in taking care of my wife.

MARIE-JEANNE. What? You are married?

DIDIER [*to* MARIE-JEANNE]. Monsieur Stangy has been kind enough to busy himself right away with what I am to do in the future.

STANGY. I couldn't say right off what opening there might be in Paris or in France. I hear so little outside of my own business. Do you know English at all?

MARIE-JEANNE. He speaks it beautifully.

STANGY [*to* DIDIER]. An idea has just come into my head, but in thinking it over I feel some hesitation in mentioning it. As I am in doubt about sending this fragile little person to a tropical climate, would I be justified in offering you a proposition that would separate you from her for a while?

MARIE-JEANNE. If you have in mind an advantageous position for Didier, if you have the means of giving him back confidence in his work, faith in his success, and that proud ardor that was my joy—— Oh! Monsieur, speak without hesitation!

STANGY. Very well, then. I don't know when I shall feel like going back to my affairs over there.

They are organized in such a way that they go along without me in the hands of managers and foremen and what not. But I've just been informed that I am in need there of a man who combines great technical ability with the highest probity, and as Mme. Revel has recommended you as such, I thought of you.

DIDIER. Monsieur, I am deeply grateful for your offer and I realize that in my present position I ought to grasp any chance I can get. But since it is a question of being separated from my wife, you understand——

STANGY. But if it were a really big thing that was coming to you, don't you think you both could stand the separation for a short while, like sailors and their wives, for instance? Besides, after the first half year you could come back for your holidays and relieve the strain of your widowerhood. Next year, without doubt, I should be there to relieve you at your post, and after that—well, you should see! And your wife could, without doubt, make you longer or shorter visits over there on the other side of the ocean. As for remuneration for your services, I should arrange that directly by contract, giving you a good salary and an interest in the business which

would be worth consideration. I can guarantee that, with perseverance, in a few years you will be independent, rich, and then you both will say that the result is worth the sacrifices you both made to achieve it.

DIDIER. Marie-Jeanne, it is my chance to atone, to rehabilitate myself, to expiate!

MARIE-JEANNE. Take it! [*To* STANGY.] I accept for him! We can never, never repay you! It's all arranged then, is it? You won't change your mind? We have your word?

STANGY. Yes, my little friend.

DIDIER. When do you want me to start?

STANGY. As soon as possible. I'll explain to you everything that has to be done right away. Could you get off by the end of this week?

DIDIER. Marie-Jeanne! To go away from you before you are well!

MARIE-JEANNE. Don't bother about me! Put yourself entirely in Monsieur Stangy's hands.

STANGY [*to* DIDIER]. We shall have to consider just how you are to cut loose from your former connections. But we mustn't worry this pretty head. Let her go on with her reading, and, if you like, we can take a walk until lunch time.

DIDIER. Just as you say. [*He kisses* MARIE-JEANNE *on the brow.*]

MARIE-JEANNE. Good-bye then, for the present.

[*Exeunt* STANGY *and* DIDIER.

Enter SABINE, *returning from the Palace.*

SABINE. You out here! Aren't you cold? What is it, my child, you are smiling and frowning at the same time.

MARIE-JEANNE. Monsieur Stangy, with the liberality you know so well, has offered Didier a position. He promises to make him a rich man right away if my husband will go to America by the end of the week to take his place.

SABINE. No, really?

MARIE-JEANNE. It is an offer he couldn't possibly refuse.

SABINE. Certainly not! It is an unheard-of piece of luck! Didier would have had great difficulty in getting a position of any importance here, while over there he will have everything in his favor even if it does mean exiling himself for a while. But, my child, how will you stand being separated from him?

MARIE-JEANNE. I? I've no idea of being separated from Didier.

SABINE. What do you mean?

MARIE-JEANNE. I am going with my husband, of course.

SABINE. That is out of the question! Why, you are only just convalescent. You couldn't possibly take such a long voyage, let alone live in a country where the heat is severe, even on the strongest! Don't even dream of such a thing!

MARIE-JEANNE. You know that what made me ill in the beginning was seeing Didier in trouble, worried to death with anxiety and discouragement! I shall be cured when I see him at one with himself, busy and prosperous. Already I am better just at the mere thought of his being so.

SABINE. And where do I come in in this arrangement?

MARIE-JEANNE. You couldn't take grandmother along with us so far away, and you couldn't very well leave her behind.

SABINE. So your plans are already made to go away within a week, to live fifteen hundred leagues from me?

MARIE-JEANNE. Could I very well put those

fifteen hundred leagues between my husband and myself?

SABINE. You are not compelled either of you to leave Paris. It's not as though it were a case of dire necessity. Didier can find something else to do.

MARIE-JEANNE. Why, you said yourself only a minute ago that Didier couldn't get any decent sort of position here. You wouldn't condemn us both to something mediocre, would you, when a brilliant future lies clear before us? We are still on the threshold of life, and the chance is offered us to set our place in the house of Fortune, at the banquet board of millions!

SABINE. What utter nonsense! And you're so serious about it! Marie-Jeanne, you're just joking, aren't you?

MARIE-JEANNE. Quite the contrary, I was never more serious in my life. Mother, dear, it will be a terrible wrench to say good-bye to you——

SABINE. There will be no question of that! You forget that Stangy came to your assistance entirely on my behalf. Do you suppose when he finds out that his plan will be crucifixion for me that he will see it through?

MARIE-JEANNE. You won't try to make him go

back on his promise! Ah! Mother! Do not destroy the magnificent hopes that Didier and I have built up! Do not throw him down again into the mire!

SABINE. Have no fear! Low as I have fallen, I shall not have recourse to a third person to teach you a lesson, to show you how, to force you to love me!

MARIE-JEANNE. Am I not right in putting my love for my husband before anything else? But if your reproaches and the weight of your authority had not upset me so, I should have been able to speak differently to you, to make you love me all the more!

SABINE. No! No! You do not love me at all! The person one really loves, one prefers, since at the moment of choosing one belongs body and soul to the chosen being, and for that person one will march rough-shod over the rest! The people that one does not love at all, or loves a little, or loves very much, these are held only in various degrees of indifference. I have put you before all others—— There was a time when I thought that that man who was here a moment ago had made me suffer. I thought just now that he could make me suffer again. But that was not suffering! It is only from you, now at this moment, that I am learning to the depths of my being

what suffering is! Marie-Jeanne, if despair takes me out of myself and blinds me, if in spite of all evidence there is still in your flesh a tiny remnant of feeling for me, tell me, my little one, that you could not have known what I am suffering, tell me that you will not tear yourself away from me, nor put between us that immensity of space and time!

MARIE-JEANNE. I swear to you, Mother, dear, that I wish I could cut myself in two. But at least my absence will not be forever. I shall come back one day, and throw my arms around your neck with delight.

SABINE. Yes, if sorrow has not already sent me to my grave!

MARIE-JEANNE. Don't even talk of such things, Mother! Why, I have friends who have had to go to Algeria or Indo-China with their husbands. They would have had to get divorces if their own happiness and their interest in their homes had not been the first consideration with their mothers.

SABINE. I have taken every interest I could in your home; I have no quarrel against that. I want nothing beyond seeing you happy and having you near me. I only want to have my part in your happiness, in seeing the roses come again in your cheeks.

I want you just as if in all the twenty-one years since I brought you into the world we had never been separated. I have given you as a token of my affection all the anxieties of your childhood: the perplexed days and the sleepless nights; and every cry from your lips since the moment you were born has made me suffer once again the birth pangs with which I brought you forth. I have given you as pledge, all these years, a devotion capable, you may believe me, of committing the worst of crimes for your sake. I have no fear of putting my right to you into the balance with that of Monsieur Didier!

MARIE-JEANNE [*getting up*]. Mother, I beg of you, don't speak of Didier in that way! Remember, he is my husband!

SABINE. Your husband, yes! That means that four years ago he was nothing more to you than a complete stranger whom passing chance threw in your way. The bond between you was forged in the facile pleasure of mere caresses. The reason for it? If not yourself with your purity and charm, perhaps your dowry!

MARIE-JEANNE. How dare you insinuate any such thing! To cast doubt upon his affection for

me! I warn you, Mother, if you value my love for you, don't say another word!

SABINE. So I'm to keep quiet while you stand up for him for taking you away from me! I might remind you what this blackleg has given you, in exchange for all he got when he married you! Tears! The wrecking of your health! Bankruptcy!

MARIE-JEANNE. This is too much! Whoever strikes at him wounds me! Good-bye!

SABINE. Where are you going?

MARIE-JEANNE. To the end of the world with my bankrupt! My blackleg! [*Exit.*

SABINE [*calling after her*]. Marie-Jeanne! She doesn't turn around! She is going forever! I am left alone! [*Turning toward the chalet.*] Mother! Mother!

MME. FONTENAIS [*enters running*]. What has happened? You frightened me to death!

SABINE. Marie-Jeanne has gone! I shall never see her again! Her husband is taking her away to Stangy's country on the other side of the world to seek their fortune!

MME. FONTENAIS. What nonsense! A mere scheme that will vanish into thin air.

SABINE. Oh, no! You would believe me if you

had seen Marie-Jeanne just now! After all I have gone through with her, that this should have happened! Oh! How she spoke to me! How she hurt me! Oh! Oh!

MME. FONTENAIS. My dear Sabine, don't cry like that! [*Her words are punctuated by* SABINE'S *sobs.*] Your poor tears agitate me much more than your anger, against which I was so hard and cold. What can I do for you, my dear child? I'll tell you, I'll give them all the money they need. Yes, I know your father will forgive me for breaking my oath. I will talk to Didier and find out how much he must have to keep him here with Marie-Jeanne!

SABINE. They won't listen to you! They have both of them run mad with their dreams and illusions of millions. All the money you have in the world wouldn't be enough for them now! They will go away, and I must make myself forget Marie-Jeanne! After what she said, we could never feel the same again to one another. I no longer have a daughter; I have no one in the world but you. I never had any one but you and I have treated you like a beast! Yes, I have! But I promise you that to the end of my days I will do everything in my power to make you happy! I only want to throw myself on my knees

before you and lay my heavy head in your lap—— Why, what's the matter?

MME. FONTENAIS [*trying to stand up*]. Ah! [*She falls on the ground.*]

SABINE. Oh! Oh! No! Not that! Not that! Speak to me! Make some sign! How she clings to my hand! [*She snatches her hand away violently.*] Her eyes! Dead! She's dead! And for my daughter's sake I have killed my mother!

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